THE COMPASS OF TERRESTRIAL DIRECTIONS, VOL. I

THE SCAVENGER LANDS™

A SETTING BOOK FOR

EXALTED SECOND EDITION

Dawn Byrnes (order #67607)

Forged from the shattered remains of the Dragon-Blooded Shogunate and tempered in the fires of war, the so-called Scavenger Lands continue to stand in defiance of the tyranny of the Realm, as they have done for eight centuries. Ranging from mighty Lookshy in the west to the eclectic Hundred Kingdoms in the east, the states of the Confederation of Rivers offer a treasure trove of First Age wonders, minor dominions and mortal followers for the returned Solar Exalt who's willing to risk the wrath of the Seventh Legion to claim them.

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- Traits for the Scavenger Lands' native gods and beasts

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AGE OF SORROWS

EXALTED SECOND EDITION

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THE SCAVENGER LANDS™

By Kraig Blackwelder, Genevieve Cogman, Daniel Dover, Michael Kessler and Andrew Watt

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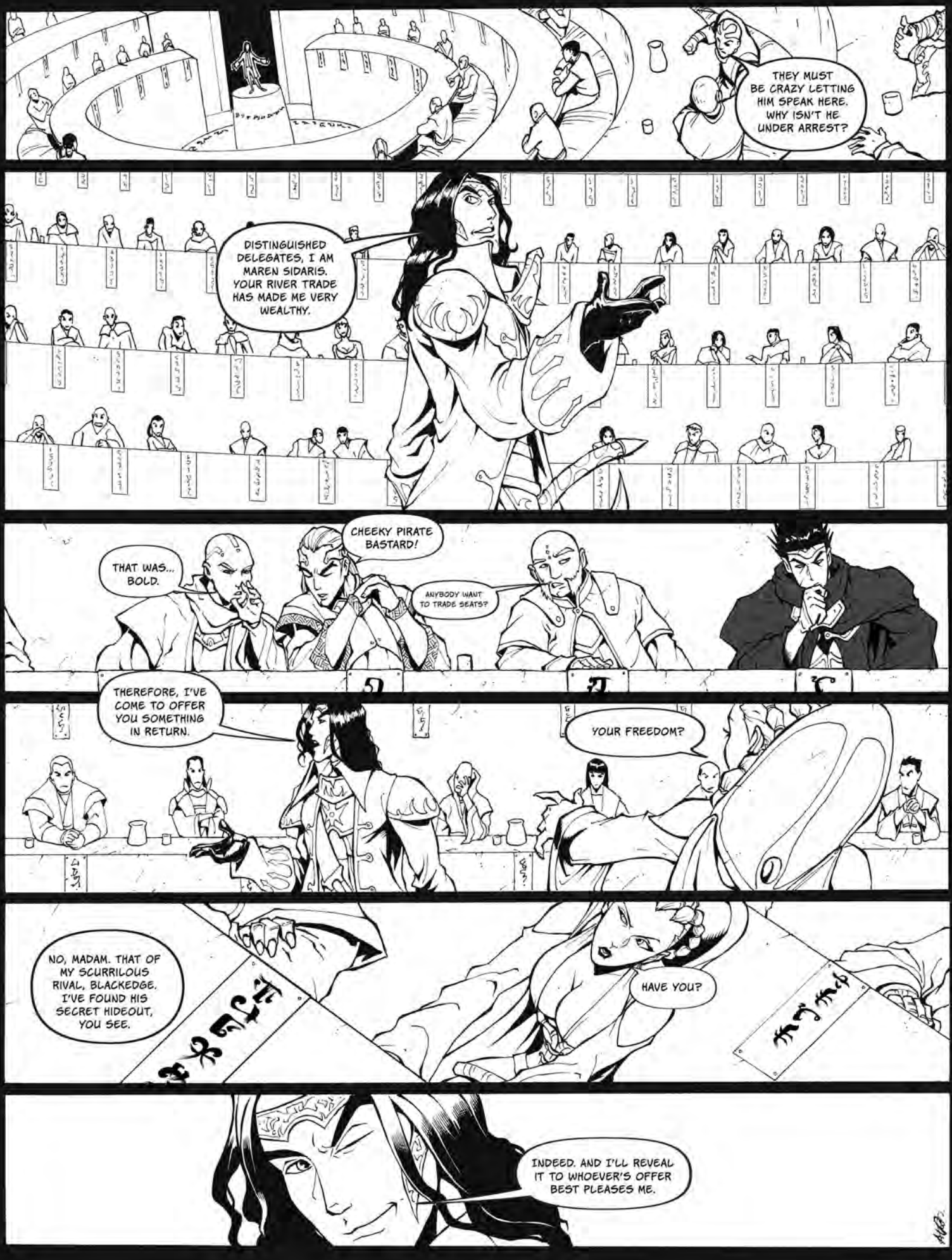
THEY MUST BE CRAZY LETTING HIM SPEAK HERE. WHY ISN'T HE UNDER ARREST?
DISTINGUISHED DELEGATES, I AM MAREN SIDARIS. YOUR RIVER TRADE HAS MADE ME VERY WEALTHY.
CHEEKY PIRATE BASTARD!
THAT WAS... BOLD.
ANYBODY WANT TO TRADE SEATS?
THEREFORE, I'VE COME TO OFFER YOU SOMETHING IN RETURN.
YOUR FREEDOM?
NO, MADAM. THAT OF MY SCURRILOUS RIVAL, BLACKEDGE. I'VE FOUND HIS SECRET HIDEOUT, YOU SEE.
HAVE YOU?
INDEED. AND I'LL REVEAL IT TO WHOEVER'S OFFER BEST PLEASES ME.

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INTRODUCTION

An association of men who will not quarrel with one another is a thing which has never yet existed, from the greatest confederacy of nations down to a town meeting or a vestry.
—Thomas Jefferson, Letter, June 1, 1798

Since the fall of the Dragon-Blooded Shogunate eight centuries past, the Scavenger Lands have forged their own destiny in defiance of both the odds and the forces of the Scarlet Empire. Shattered by the twin blows of the Great Contagion and the subsequent invasion by the Fair Folk, the former River Province of the Shogunate rebuilt itself, eschewing the Realm's help and its dominance. Defending their independence again and again over the centuries, the states of the Scavenger Lands have grown into economic powerhouses and bastions of freedom that are the envy and inspiration of the rest of the free world.

How to Use This Book

The Compass of Terrestrial Directions, Vol. I—The Scavenger Lands is a setting book designed to provide players and Storytellers with all they need to play games set in any of the numerous states of the Confederation of Rivers. From the deiocracy of Great Forks to the Realm puppet-state of Greyfalls, from the military dictatorship of Lookshy to the myriad tiny nations that make up the so-called Hundred Kingdoms, there are settings aplenty for every type of group and style of play, complete with dominion traits for **Exalted**'s optional Mandate of Heaven rules.

Chapter One: The History of the Scavenger Lands

This chapter offers a detailed overview of River Province history. From its First Age origins as the breadbasket of the Old Realm to its present incarnation as the defiant Confederation of Rivers, this region has always influenced the affairs of nations Creation-wide.

Chapter Two: The Heart of the Scavenger Lands

This section focuses on Nexus, the most populous city of the Scavenger Lands. Crouched like a bloated spider at the confluence of the River Province's three greatest waterways, the lawless city of Nexus exerts enormous influence on the

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Scavenger Lands and beyond through its web of trade routes spun by economic powerhouse, the Guild.

Chapter Three: Warlords of the Scavenger Lands

Chapter Three focuses on Lookshy and one of its martial allies, the Marukan Alliance. From the fortress-city of Lookshy, the mighty Seventh Legion sallies forth to defend the Scavenger Lands from its many enemies, be they imperial legions, barbarian invaders or even the unfathomable Fair Folk. Yet the Seventh Legion does not operate alone. Tied by treaty to the other states of the Confederation of Rivers, the field forces of Lookshy have often operated alongside the armies of other River Province nations. One of its most respected allies is also detailed here, Marukan, home of the rightly feared horselords.

Chapter Four: The City of Temples

This chapter concerns itself with Great Forks, one of the Confederation's most powerful states and one ruled directly by three powerful gods: Spinner of Glorious Tales, Weaver of Dreams of Victory, and Shield of a Different Day. Eschewing the Immaculate faith, the people of Great Forks share their city with a number of minor divinities and God-Bloods, many of whom immigrated to the city because of its renowned tolerance.

Chapter Five: Empire of the Dead

This section covers Thorns, a totalitarian state suffering under the despotic rule of the Deathlord Mask of Winters. Once loyal subjects of the Realm and devout followers of the Immaculate faith, Thorns' people now slave for the Deathlord and his Abyssal champions and are forcibly converted to the blasphemous ancestor cult.

Chapter Six: Last Bastion of the Scarlet Empire

Chapter Seven concerns itself with the final outpost of the Realm in the Scavenger Lands, Greyfalls. Ceded to the Empress by the treaty ending the Realm's third invasion of the River Province, Greyfalls was long considered a provincial backwater to which were sent the dregs of Realm society. Thanks to the efforts of House Nellens, however, the country has enjoyed a rebirth of sorts and now threatens to use its newfound economic and military might to expand into sovereign Confederation territory.

Chapter Seven: The Empty City

In the heart of the Hundred Kingdoms lies the lost First Age city of Denandsor. Protected by a cursed miasma and an army of robotic guardians, its greatest treasures still wait to be uncovered by the Exalts clever or tenacious enough to best its defenses.

Chapter Eight: Gods and Monsters of the Scavenger Lands

The Scavenger Lands is a dangerous place, and this chapter outlines some of its deadliest denizens. From the Emissary of Nexus to giant maggots that crawl beneath the flesh of the Mask of Winters' corpse-fortress Juggernaut, over 25 threats native to the region are given full traits for use in **Exalted** series.

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NO WAIT. IT GETS BETTER.
TWO SUMMERS LATER, THE ARCZECKHI BASTARDS CAME BACK. THEY RAZED MERESH AND PLUNDERED DARANGIN AND MATETHA.
BUT CHUMYO WHITE OF LOOKSHY AMBUSHED THE BARBARIANS AT NECHARA, TRAPPING THEM AGAINST THE MARUTO RIVER...
...WHERE WHITE FOUGHT HIS WAY THROUGH THE HORDE AND FACED OFF AGAINST MOKUU, THE BARBARIAN CHIEFTAIN.
MOKUU WAS FEARSOME, BUT WHITE WAS AN EXALTED SORCERER. HE BROKE THE ARMY'S BACK IN A SINGLE STROKE.
BUT I ONLY TOLD YOU THAT STORY TO TELL YOU THIS ONE, ABOUT WHEN MOKUU CAME BACK AND WHAT IT TOOK TO STOP HIM...

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CHAPTER ONE
THE HISTORY OF THE SCAVENGER LANDS

The Scavenger Lands lie to the east of the Realm, across the Inland Sea. To the Scarlet Dynasty, they are a constant thorn and irritation, a source of shame and a drain on resources. To those who would rebel against the Realm, the Scavenger Lands are where heroes raised a banner of defiance and built a group of kingdoms that still hold firm and free. To their inhabitants, they are home, soaked in the blood of the ancestors who fought for their freedom, protected by the gods they worship, hallowed by the ancient dead who still watch over them.

That said, only one who closed his eyes to reality could deny that the Scavenger Lands are full of danger, chaos and war. The hundreds of tiny kingdoms constantly squabble with each other, restrained only by the bindings of the Confederation of Rivers and the military supremacy of Lookshy. Scavenger lords pick over the relics of the First Age and arm themselves with ancient weapons and half-understood sorceries. The Fair Folk strike from the boundaries of Creation, and the Deathlords threaten both the living and the dead. (One, the Mask of Winters, has even conquered the province of Thorns and set his corpse-fortress, Juggernaut, prowling across the bone-strewn land.) The Scavenger Lands are free, but that freedom comes at a high price.

The Scavenger Lands are also full of wonders and glories. The Shogunate-era towers of Lookshy, the plains of the Marukan Alliance, the great aeries of Mount Metagalapa, the shrouded city of Sijan—where the living spend their lives honoring the dead—the god-ruled city of Great Forks, Thorns—where the Mask of Winters spreads his dark power outward—Greyfalls—the last bastion of the Realm—the silent city of Denandsor… First Age manses lie undiscovered in hidden places, and the tombs of long-dead Solars and Lunars have lain undisturbed for centuries, filled with the relics of those who ruled before the Usurpation.

This chapter gives an overview of the history of the Scavenger Lands, from its birth as a set of nations at the time of the Realm's founding to the present day. The picture is incomplete, of course. Many heroes have passed into his-

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tory and been forgotten, many alliances have died along with the kingdoms that gave them birth, and many wars have left only bones and ashes in their traces, rather than descendants who could remember them. Nonetheless, in spite of the Realm's constant efforts to conquer and absorb them, the Scavenger Lands still remain free and hold fast against invaders from all sides. In this time of turmoil and war, they could be the deciding factor that tips the balance of the world's future.

The History of the River Province

In the First Age, the River Province was the heartland of the Realm, a place of natural bounty, fabled for its mineral wealth and fertile soil. Dozens of glorious cities rose along its many rivers, and merchants came from across the world to trade for metals, grains, livestock and finished goods. The raw materials of the East were shipped north or south to cities on the Yanaze River and then transported downstream to cities at the river mouth, thence to be shipped to all corners of the Realm. Even the Usurpation and the wars of the Shogunate did not damage the River Province as much as it did some areas. Although Solars died there and manses fell and cities were shattered, still much continued as it had always done. The people thrived, and the land flourished.

Then the Great Contagion and the subsequent invasion of the Fair Folk struck the River Province and shattered it. Cities were decimated, fields were salted, mines were shattered and ruined, and wide swathes of landscape were twisted by the Wyld. Shadowlands sprang up where the death toll was highest, and many of the region's great manses succumbed to abandonment and decay. And still the Fair Folk came, sweeping in from the south and east and north, harrying those who still lived like hares before hounds. The remainder of the Dragon-Blooded forces in the area rallied to the strongest remaining command, the Seventh Legion, which coordinated defense from the ruins of the city of Deheleshen (later rebuilt as Lookshy), but even they could do little to hold back the forces of the Wyld.

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When the Scarlet Empress used the Realm's ancient defenses to drive back the Fair Folk and reestablish the boundaries of Creation, few in the River Province understood what had transpired. In many places, the defense systems caused as much devastation as the attacks and plague and Wyld that had gone before. The Scarlet Dynasty might have been born that day, but the River Province neither knew nor cared. Its people were preoccupied with their own survival.

Refugees from throughout Creation made their way to the River Province, drawn by tales of the region's great wealth and fertile land. They found a blasted, war-torn country, where the cities were in ruins and the battlefields stretched from horizon to horizon. Yet they also found survivors, and areas where the Contagion had not bitten too deeply, and most of all, they found heroes and leaders. Despite their often stark differences, local survivors and refugees worked together to rebuild. Fifty years later, when the emissaries of the Scarlet Empress came to demand oaths of fealty, a number of city-states had risen on the ruins of pre-Contagion towns and cities. Few of these new powers saw any need to acknowledge the Empress's claim to the imperial throne—or to sacrifice their newly found independence.

For five years, the Realm's diplomats tried to cajole, bribe or coerce the new city-states of the River Province into fealty to the Realm. They had some successes along the coastline, where they could use the Realm's navy to add threats to their diplomacy, but most of the "upstart nations" (the term "Scavenger Lands" was not yet common) refused any sort of alliance with the Realm. Foremost among the independent nations was the newly established Lookshy, whose example served to hearten many of the others.

In the 57th year of the Empress' reign, the Forth Imperial Legion invaded the River Province. Using what are now the cities of Port Calin, Celeren and Marin Bay as staging grounds, the legion drove systematically eastward, leaving garrisons and puppet rulers in each city they conquered. The legionnaires soon found that, while conquering the River Province was relatively easy, keeping it pacified was not. Even in the cities they controlled, the legionnaires faced sneak attacks and ambushes. In the countryside, they controlled only what they could see. Resistance was unorganized, undisciplined and unprepared, but also fierce, determined and equipped with First Age weapons.

After two years of fighting, the Realm controlled the province's major cities and most of the smaller cities and towns, with two notable exceptions. One was Sijan, which the Realm left undisturbed out of respect for the dead. The other was Lookshy, where negotiations continued with the Seventh Legion. The Seventh Legion's commander, Chumyo Nefvarin, was a strategic prodigy and had collected large stocks of First Age weaponry in the period just after the Contagion. Few of his contemporaries were willing to challenge his battlefield acumen, and his troops were better equipped than even the forces of the Realm.

Despite its ferocity, the resistance would have eventually failed due to its lack of coordination and structure. New cadres

To the so-called Scarlet Empress, self-proclaimed Ruler of the Blessed Isle and Defender of the Realm,

I must inform you that I reject your claim to the title of Empress. While you certainly command a number of legions and can, therefore, claim to control the Blessed Isle, these alone do not make you the Shogun. Your actions in reactivating the ancient defenses of the Realm and casting back the fae are commendable, but they do not make you the Shogun either.

Shogun is a title you must earn, and I cannot support your claim to it. You are unknown to me, and so, I must assume that you are a low-ranking officer who happened to be in the right place at the right time. You have not yet demonstrated strategic acumen or political ability. I will not submit to the rule of a functionary, nor will I turn control of this legion over to you or your emissaries. If you wish to become the true Shogun of the Dragon-Blooded, you will have to defeat me in battle and prove you deserve the title.

My last official orders from my daimyo were quite clear: defend the River Province and provide what support I can. This I have done, and this I shall continue to do as long as my lungs draw breath. Come and get us if you wish. We will be waiting.

Chumyo Nefvarin Gilshalos, Lord of Lookshy Manor, Commander of the Seventh Legion of the Dragon-Blooded Shogunate

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sprang up almost as swiftly as others were wiped out, but the imperial legionnaires were used to dealing with uprisings and revolts. As time passed, however, resistance attacks decreased in number but drastically increased in coordination and effectiveness. The resistance cells became better organized and more sophisticated, due to the behind-the-scenes assistance of the Seventh Legion. Through the months of negotiations with the Realm, legion troops at Lookshy had been secretly training the most promising cells in the tactics of revolution. Knowing he could not hope to defeat the entrenched imperial troops surrounding his city, Chumyo Nefvarin set out to wear down the Empress's forces and to build an army that could support his efforts to force the Realm out of the River Province.

In the 67th year of the Scarlet Empress's reign, the River Province exploded in a storm of violence against imperial outposts and units. Patrols were ambushed by organized, battle-trained guerillas; warships were burned to the waterline in ports or sabotaged on the open water; and isolated encampments and fortifications were besieged and sacked. For two years, the Realm legionnaires fought a losing battle against these guerilla fighters while having to simultaneously remain alert for a counterattack from the Seventh Legion. Eventually, early in the 69th year of her reign, the Scarlet Empress withdrew her troops back to allied territory.

The Second Invasion

Many in the River Province celebrated, believing they'd driven off the Realm for good. Nefvarin knew better. He took steps to solidify the tenuous lines of communication formed during the revolt and shepherded the first overtures toward a formal alliance between the free countries of the River Province. Several of the small city-states on the Yanaze began building warships to patrol the rivers and escort merchant vessels along the shores of the Inland Sea as trade between nations recovered, while the inland kingdoms began drilling their newly established armies for a renewed attack. The city of Nexus was quickly growing from the First Age ruins of the city of Hollow as a locus for trade.

The assault was not long in coming, and it was far worse than anyone had expected. In RY 75, the Scarlet Empress invaded again, with a total force of four fresh imperial legions. Lookshy was besieged, and the newly formed Nexus was captured and occupied. Provincial warships caught on the rivers were destroyed, while those that had been at sea when the invasion occurred were reduced to privateering, acting primarily as raiders and destroying the occasional Realm warship. Even Sijan, spared during the first invasion, was garrisoned during this round of warfare.

Once again, the imperial legions found that taking ground was easier than holding it. Despite their early successes, the Realm offensive quickly bogged down. The countryside was in open insurrection, and Lookshy withstood siege for over a year, inflicting heavy casualties against several assaults.

In RY 76, the tide turned. Lookshy smuggled a powerful First Age weapon into the surrounding imperial camp, one that shattered the souls of all who heard its deadly song. The Seventh Legion then sallied forth to slaughter the few surviving imperial troops. After this bloody victory, the Seventh marched to the site of what is now the city of Great Forks, where it engaged and destroyed the imperial Fourth Legion. In Nexus, the mysterious Emissary proclaimed that all Realm forces must withdraw from the city and never again enter it. In response, Realm troops besieged the Council Tower, killing two Councilors before being slaughtered in turn by the Emissary. Within a week, every officer above the rank of talonlord in Nexus was slain, and the remaining imperial forces in the Province, bereft of their best leadership, regrouped and withdrew down the Yanaze River.

The Third Invasion

The Realm made a final effort to invade in RY 88, landing with seven legions of imperial foot and at least twice that many auxiliaries raised from tributary states. By this time, the Realm *had* to defeat the River Province or live with it as a permanent shameful reminder that it was not omnipotent. The resulting conflict was a war that saw the use of a great deal of First Age magic, including some very powerful weapons. The city of Lookshy was once again besieged, and the Seventh Legion field forces were cut off from their base.

The war was short, brutal and ugly. Troops from Melevhil and Nathir harried the imperial forces in the Gray River basin, while the Seventh Legion tied down several imperial legions. The final battle took place in the fields outside Melevhil, between the Empress's Own Guard and the Seventh Legion Mobile Force. Over 100 Dragon-Blooded heroes on both sides took the field, and all of the Guard's 19 warstriders were cut down by the battle's end. The forces of the Realm were driven back, having lost many of their First Age weapons and best officers. Melevhil itself was shattered by the conflict, and only its ruins remain today. The Realm fleet was scuttled in a surprise attack by saboteurs during the battle, and the Realm was forced to evacuate its troops with merchant vessels.

The Formation of the League

The third invasion gave rise to a defensive alliance among the powers of the Scavenger Lands. This alliance was known as the League of Many Rivers, and the treaty that created it was signed in RY 95. The League was more a compact of mutual assistance than an actual organization. It was an agreement between the states of the Scavenger Lands (the River Province had by now been given this name by the invading Realm forces) to band together against outside foes and prevent conquest through divide-and-rule politics. Though Lookshy was unambiguously the de facto regional leader, the compact made no specific allowances for the Seventh Legion to command regional forces in times of war. (History suggests that this leadership was not so much granted as it was simply understood, with Chumyo Nefvarin's prowess fresh in the minds of all.)

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Heroes of the Realm Wars

The most striking feature of the Realm Wars was not that they were fought, but that the Scavenger Lands won. At the time, the people of the region were poorly organized, ill-coordinated, few in numbers and unready for any sort of major war. Indeed, many of the smaller cities had trouble keeping brigands from their gates, let alone imperial soldiers. Their advantage lay in the talent, determination and heroism of their leaders.

Names such as Chumyo Nefvarin Gilshalos, Birk of Neverwater, Mortician Aldis Nerin of Sijan, Warlord Kerin and Dictatrix Alix Brightsword are known in fable and history as the leaders of the wars, but around them orbited a constellation of other heroes. Among them were dedicated talonlords of the Seventh Legion, the infamous spy Mara, Garil of the Horselords (the nomads who later settled in Marukan), the mercenary Order of the Sword and Axe, and a host of others. Without these courageous and gifted individuals and groups, the River Province would have fallen to the Realm, becoming just one more subject territory.

These heroes form the mythology of the Scavenger Lands. Festivals are held in their names and great deeds are done in their honor. Legendary deeds, wise sayings and traditions are ascribed to them. Children learn their names; adults strive to emulate their example. Their ghosts still appear occasionally, delivering portents and signaling events of great import.

The agreement openly embraced regional conflicts and specifically permitted member-states to resolve disputes through military force. Nevertheless, the League pledge gave the region an identity and sent a signal to the Realm that the River Province was willing to unite to protect its independence in the face of aggression.

Early Disputes

Most of the early states in the region were originally based on the territories of various Shogunate daimyos and centered on their capitals or fortresses. As a result, most had contentious relations, despite the diluting effect of refugees from outside. The Seventh Legion's political core consisted of the regional superdaimyo's household troops, and most of the major states saw Lookshy's own political maneuvering as an attempt to assert overall dominance.

These early days of independence saw several vicious scuffles over power, in which Lookshy fought most of the other states at once and in various combinations. (Sijan stayed neutral, as ever.) The Province drifted into a sullen quiescence, punctuated by border raids and diplomatic incidents, while the local states built up their militaries and trained them to professional caliber. Lookshy, however, was the only state with known large stocks of First Age weapons.

Almost unnoticed at the time by the warring states, Brem Marst founded the Guild in RY 99. He united the River League, a caravan network of Scavenger Land merchants, and the philosophies of the Counters, a confederation of merchant-philosophers based in the Lap, with the support of merchant houses from Sijan, Nexus and Chaya. While it ventured as far northwest as Whitehall and as far southwest as the Lap, the Guild was primarily a River Province institution for the next four decades.

During the next few decades, a number of coastal states of the former River Province foreswore their fealty to the Scarlet Empire and petitioned to join the nascent League of Many Rivers. (They were assisted in this by the Guild, which funneled money and supplies to them in order to expand its own trade base.) After much deliberation, these states were allowed to join the League. Toothless protests from the Blessed Isle (still rebuilding from its earlier losses) were ignored.

Despite frequent attempts by the Realm to enlist the Guild as an ally, Brem Marst knew that his Guild would be stronger without a permanent debt to the Realm. In RY 117, he treated with the Council of Entities of Nexus and established that city as the permanent headquarters of the Guild.

Events in the region finally boiled over in a sustained major conflict in RY 265, when the Laris and Velen administrative districts went to war over water rights to the Sandy River, in a dispute that had its roots in First Age conflicts between the two regions. The resulting war drew in most of the regional states, exhausting the resources of nations that could barely *afford* to support standing armies. It was also the last war in the area in which First Age weapons figured prominently, since most states had depleted their treasuries and arsenals by the time it was over. (Lookshy had refrained from getting involved on either side.) The states involved had also done so much damage to the remains of their physical and human First Age infrastructures that the region could no longer support governments of any appreciable size. Power devolved to a prefecture level, and only in the next century did larger states re-emerge.

The Realm made another venture (it scarcely deserved the title of war) against the region in RY 301, just after the collapse of most of the provincial combatants. The Realm sent two legions and a large contingent of auxiliary forces drawn from various satrapies, including a substantial contingent of Linowan. The Seventh Legion deployed two field forces, caught the imperials in a pincer movement just south of Sijan and routed them. They took thousands of prisoners, including a satrap and two dragonlords, whom they ransomed back to the Realm for a princely sum. The resulting scandal ultimately led to the public disgrace of House Iselsi and ended the Realm's ambitions in the area for the next few centuries.

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The Arczeckh Horde

In RY 364, the League faced a new foe: the Arczeckh barbarian horde, no longer content to raid caravans, but driving up from the southern wastelands into the River Province itself. The barbarians were led by Mokuu, chief of the Chalan tribe, who had welded the diverse Arczeckh people into a unified whole. Through promises of wealth for all, the surreptitious murder of chieftains who refused to cooperate and a near-supernatural charisma, he assembled a horde that invaded the southern reaches of the League.

Over the next five years, Mokuu's forces overwhelmed several League cities, including Matetha, Darangin, Aryvyras and Cho-Holuth. The Arczeckhi were poised to strike at the major trade centers of Meresh and Nechara when the armies of the League finally turned them back. After serious losses, the horde retreated, only to return two summers later to raze Meresh and plunder Darangin, Matetha, and Cho-Holuth a second time. Taimyo White of Lookshy responded with an ambush at Nechara, in which the Seventh Legion caught Mokuu's forces against the Maruto River and crushed them decisively. The two leaders' personal guards fought for almost an hour. Their titanic battle ended when White used powerful sorcery to call down fire from the open sky, slaying Mokuu but critically injuring himself. White is to this day honored as a patron hero of Nechara.

Without Mokuu's leadership, the horde broke up and fled back to Arczeckh territories. Though the tribes continue their raiding to this day, they have never again banded together to attack the Scavenger Lands. Some war-leaders have tried to unify the Arczeckh tribes, calling on the spirit of Mokuu (now a minor god of war), but none have succeeded. Nonetheless, they remain a constant concern to the southern members of the Confederation of Rivers to this day.

The Fair Folk Attack

In RY 547, after nearly two centuries of relative peace, an alliance of Fair Folk nobles opened hostilities against the Hundred Kingdoms region of the River Province. Though they brought great behemoths from the Wyld with them, all the Fair Folk taking part in the assault were shaped and formed to exist in Creation—this was a war of conquest rather than destruction. This conflict marked the end of the League of Many Rivers. Most of the League states were eager to lend forces at the beginning of the war, recognizing the mutual threat, but none were prepared for the sheer length of the fighting.

The Fair Folk had prepared well and had gathered a great host of hobgoblins to serve as ground troops. Even with the Scavenger Lands' iron weapons, the war ground on. Most of the Fair Folk could not stand against the humans in open battle, but they used their powers of glamour to move and strike swiftly

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and to remove human commanders and enslave key figures in the human forces. Only after seven years of campaigning were the Fair Folk driven from the Scavenger Lands, primarily by Nexus mercenaries and Seventh Legion troops.

During the last three years of the war, sheer exhaustion forced almost every small League kingdom to quit the fray. Lacking direction and ability to cooperate, and with the heroes of yore having passed away, their armies were set upon and cut apart. The war against the Fair Folk starkly illuminated the League's weakness.

This weakness was remedied by the Treaty of the Confederation of Rivers, brokered and signed in RY 557, which established a forum for shared deliberations and allowed a greatly superior level of backchannel communications and behind-the-scenes negotiation. It was no longer a time for heroes; it was a time for diplomacy, cooperation and self-limitation.

The Confederation Treaty

The Confederation Treaty is deliberately vague in some respects and strict in others. It specifically defines how many troops, as a percentage of a given country's able population, can be requested for the Confederation's defense, and under what conditions. It defines the circumstances under which signatories can preemptively interfere in the affairs of other signatories. It makes vague references to honoring trade and commerce agreements, and even mentions trade regulation, but these strictures have never been spelled out or rendered into any sort of law. Its most important function is to make sure that, in the event of future invasions, the Confederation will have armies to meet them.

The Long Peace

The Confederation itself went untested for almost 200 years, during which no definite threat to the Scavenger Lands emerged. On a smaller scale, however, the kingdoms of the Confederation had several opportunities to fine-tune their alliance. Nowhere in the Threshold was free of political turmoil, banditry or barbarian incursions, and for almost two centuries, the relatively minor problems of sacked towns, civil wars and trade disputes were the backbone of Confederation politics. In that time, the Confederation became a political entity in its own right, very different from the League. Where the League had been a gathering of heroes, larger-than-life individuals who were capable of great deeds but also great cruelties, the Confederation was a gathering of nations. It developed distinct goals, agendas and an institutional identity. Regular alliances between nation-states became something that children grew up with and had lived with all their lives. The Guild strengthened its trade routes through the region. The Shogunate, the First Age and the Great Contagion receded into the past and stayed there.

The War with Thorns

In RY 748, the hereditary Autocrat of the kingdom of Thorns died. Thorns had always been an ally of the Realm, of the sort that provided vocal support and tribute but only minimal military assistance. The Realm approached the heir's younger brother, and offered him the throne if he would declare war on the Confederation—with Realm support, of course. Hungry for power and discontented with the centuries of peace, he agreed.

With the help of a dozen Dragon-Blooded advisors, the younger son seized the throne and threw his new kingdom into a frenzy of preparations for war. Alerted by its spies, the Confederation prepared its defenses. When Thorns deployed its forces outside its borders in RY 752, the Confederation was ready. The Seventh Legion struck first, staging a night assault on the Thorns camp, but the Confederation as a whole was reluctant to meet the Thorns forces in open battle, hoping to resolve the matter with minimal casualties. Despite its Dragon-Blooded leaders, the army of Thorns remained the hastily assembled force of a rural puppet state, dogged by operational ineptitude and incompetent small-unit leaders. The army of Thorns fell back in disorder in the autumn of 752 after several inconclusive months and spent the next year retraining.

In the early summer of RY 754, Thorns took the field again and achieved temporary success, mauling a force of Seventh Legion and Confederation troops at Deren's Ford. The remaining Confederation forces fell back to Mishaka, where the Thorns troops besieged them for several months. Unfortunately for Thorns, this siege kept its own armies tied down there as well, where they had to face combined forces from Lookshy, Nexus and various Confederation states. Both sides used First Age weapons on the battlefield, and although the Scavenger Lands held the field at the end of the day, all of the units involved took serious losses, with the light foot from Great Forks being wiped out almost to a man. No armistice was served, but the Battle of Mishaka marked the end of the war. Thorns was too exhausted to fight on.

Recent Events

During the Calibration of RY 763, the Empress vanished. This news was greeted in the Scavenger Lands with attitudes ranging from delight to distrust, with few being willing to take it at face value. As the strategists realized, however, this disappearance did not lessen the forces that threatened them. Many in the Realm were still eager to conquer the Scavenger Lands—all the more so, as Lookshy's stocks of First Age weaponry might well tip the balance should the Blessed Isle erupt in civil war.

In RY 764, the Deathlord known as the Mask of Winters made his move. He seized the weakened city-state of Thorns,

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slaying or enslaving the Dragon-Blooded still propping up the puppet ruler there, and established his fortress of Juggernaut, converting the area into a vast shadowland. Since seizing Thorns, the Mask of Winters has varied between proper diplomatic channels and deniable skirmishing with the rest of the Scavenger Lands, with his deathknights—including Seven Seasons Widow, the Abbot of Hunger and Dust, and Prince Resplendent in the Ruin of Ages—all having slain Dragon-Blooded from Lookshy.

The Scavenger Lands have never known a time without war or the threat of war. Despite the positive aspects of the Empress's disappearance, the potential dangers can only grow more severe without the Realm's defenses to deter the enemies of Creation. The region's last few harvests have been excellent (except in Thorns), and local leaders have set much of their produce aside as insurance against hard times to come. During these brief years of plenty, the rulers of the Scavenger Lands are arming their people and preparing for dark times ahead.

The Scavenger Lands Today

Though the name "Scavenger Lands" was first given to the region as an insult by the Realm, it has since become its name to all folk outside its borders. The region's natives call it the Confederation of Rivers on the rare occasions when they find it necessary to discuss the area as a whole. The Confederation is a loose collection of satrapies, duchies, kingdoms, principalities, republics, democracies, theocracies and other, stranger forms of government—a crazy-quilt of people and Exalted and gods, rich in potential, wealth and strife. This polyglot collection of cultures has formed its own language, the patois known as Rivertongue, a debased form of Old Realm filled with words borrowed from every corner of the world, created by refugees in the aftermath of the Great Contagion.

The gently rolling landscape of the Scavenger Lands contains dozens of streams and small rivers, the flows of water that were and still are the region's transport network,

Rivers of the Scavenger Lands

Although four main rivers—the Yellow, the Gray, the Maruto and the River of Tears—dominate the Province, it is the countless smaller rivers that gave the area its name and play vital roles in trade and irrigation. Even where the Wyld has dried up a river or changed its course, signs of the waterways' presence remains. Cities deep in the interior possess street names such as "Dockside" or "Wharfrun," and massive First Age river-gates and sand-filled locks remain where rivers once flowed.

The following list covers the region's most important waterways.

Avarice: The Avarice is a short, narrow river that empties into the River of Tears and supplies water to Sijan along the way. It is famous for the wars that have been fought along it, and some say it runs red with blood at Calibration.

Gray: The Gray is broad and shallow, running northwest from the southern jungles and finally meeting the Yellow to form the Yanaze. It's one of the biggest rivers in the Scavenger Lands.

Maruto: The Maruto is a swift and treacherous river that runs through the eastern reaches of the Scavenger Lands. Hazardous for travel, some parts of it can be traversed only via portage trails or canals.

Meander: This aptly named river wanders through the forests of the eastern Scavenger Lands and finally splinters into a hundred smaller streams and brooks deep in the woodlands. The river is a famous haunt of brigands and smugglers.

The River of Tears: Created during the First Age as a mega-engineering project, this river passes by Sijan on its way to the Yanaze, the Inland Sea and the White Sea. Its banks are low, and its waters are brackish, with salt flats and marshes scattered along its length, and unnatural forms of life dwelling in its depths. Most communities along the River of Tears are located on one of its tributaries in order to secure fresh drinking water.

Rock: The Rock River is not named for the rocky landscape it cuts through, but for the towed barges that carry ore from the mountains down to Nexus. The Rock River is relatively bandit free due to the logistical difficulties of hijacking large quantities of raw ore. Interestingly, two of its tributaries are also called Rock River. To differentiate the three, the main river is often referred to as the Greater Rock, its small northern tributary is called the Shorter Rock, and the longer tributary is referred to as the Lesser Rock.

Rolling: The Rolling River is a short tributary of the Yellow River, passing close to Great Forks and handling a lot of the water transport to and from that city.

Yanaze: Sometimes called the "mighty Yanaze," this is the widest river in the Scavenger Lands. At places, it is wide enough that a man cannot see from one bank to the other, and it is deep enough for ocean-weight ships to sail up it as far as Nexus. It is spanned at several points by huge bridges surviving from the First Age.

Yellow: The Yellow River is the longest river in the Scavenger Lands, running from Mara's Kick deep in the East all the way to Nexus, where it joins with the Gray River to form the Yanaze.

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and that gave the River Province its original name. These countless waterways are tributaries of the province's three largest rivers; the Yellow, the Yanaze, and the River of Tears. Since the First Age, these fertile watercourses have shaped life in the Scavenger Lands.

Rich as the land is, trade is the region's lifeblood. Raw ore flows from mines in the northeast down to Nexus, where it is refined, forged and sold to merchants who carry the finished products across the Inland Sea. Grain is grown in the Southeast, loaded onto barges on the Yellow River and carried to the port cities of Nexus, Goodharbor and Port Calin, while other ships carry more exotic foodstuffs back upriver from the coastal towns. Logs from lumber operations in the Far East are floated downriver in huge rafts to waiting sawmills, to be cut into lumber and shipped across the world. A common Confederation proverb runs, "The business of the Scavenger Lands is business." The powerful Guild influences trade across the whole Confederation (and Creation as a whole), but there is still room for smaller merchants as well.

Trade has brought prosperity to much of the Scavenger Lands, but it has also brought peril. Fast-moving bandits strike at convoys on land, while river pirates are common on the waterways. Often, these "outlaws" are actually forces of the local authority operating under false pretenses. Some of these brigands, such as the Dragon-Blooded outcaste Maren Sidaris, are respected for their gallantry and renowned for their honor, while others, such as the infamous river pirate Blackedge, are hated and feared. Blackedge himself is a wanted man in more than half of the Scavenger Lands, and a tale to frighten children with throughout the Confederation.

Military Power

Much of the world outside the Scavenger Lands sees the Confederation as a military machine ready to swing into action at a moment's notice, guided and spearheaded by the famous armies of Lookshy and armed to the teeth with First Age weapons. While the Confederation does little to disillusion those around it, such is not actually the case. The truth is that the many elements of its armies are too diverse, too different in training and too caught up in internal rivalries to form a coherent force. If the Confederation tried to gather all its troops to assemble an army, it would take a month to get them in one place, a year to make them fight coherently and a century to stop them fighting each other.

Confederation commanders don't try to accomplish the impossible. Different units fight in local formation, using their favored tactics, while carefully kept records of local politics and methodologies help the overall commanders coordinate the forces. This arrangement is not always successful, as proven by the disaster at Deren's Ford in RY 754, where the soldiers of Great Forks' light foot were left without proper support and slain where they stood.

The Council of the Concordat

One explicit section of the Confederation Treaty concerns the creation of a Council of the Concordat, less formally known as the Confederation Council. Each member nation selects a single representative to act as its voice in the Council, which theoretically serves as the Confederation's governing body. Because most people in the Scavenger Lands see the Confederation as hardly better than a joke, those assigned to the Council are often dilettantes, time-servers or idiots, with the occasional competent but politically undesirable individual donated by a homeland that would rather do without her. Not surprisingly, the Council is generally ineffectual except in wartime. At such moments, it abrogates all responsibility to the military experts. Most representatives have a nose for real danger and know when to call in the professional soldiers.

The Council makes its home in Marita, an otherwise unremarkable city on the western fringe of the Hundred Kingdoms, by the Yellow River. Its sole distinguishing feature is its relatively central location in Confederation territory. It has no real industry or trade and exists solely to cater to the whims of the representatives and their entourages, which vary from scant handfuls for smaller kingdoms to dozens or hundreds sent from major cities such as Great Forks or Lookshy.

Despite its grand name, the Confederation Council has little real power. It cannot levy taxes or troops, except in a crisis, and a three-quarters majority must agree for crisis status to be officially declared. It cannot enact edicts, sign treaties, enforce policy or do anything publicly useful. What it *does* is serve as a convenient locus for backroom deals, bribery and moderately civil debate and discussion. Most representatives know only that some action is being taken about some threat or other, that someone will have known all along that it was a bad idea if it fails, and that their necks are on the chopping block if their country suffers as a result.

Countries outside the Scavenger Lands are allowed to have Council representatives, but few bother sending envoys. The two notable exceptions are the Realm, which has perceived the Council's true value, and the Mask of Winters, who takes his diplomacy seriously and who frequently orders one of his deathknights to attend the Council.

The sharp contrast between the Council's apparent skill in dealing with genuine threats, and its incompetence at all other times, has given rise to dark suspicions of hidden conspiracies, "inner councils," spirits or gods assisting the Council from behind the scenes, Anathema intervention and other possibilities.

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This organization would be far more difficult to manage were it not for the legacies of the First Age and the Shogunate. Most nations of the Confederation organize their military forces on classic Shogunate-era legion models, with base units of 100 soldiers and with similar field signals for soldiers and officers alike. This general uniformity gives Confederation troops some basis for cooperation, and these practices are encouraged by the Confederation Council and by advisors from Lookshy.

The result is an army that is disjointed during its early days in the field, but that rapidly gathers cohesion and strength as operations continue. The Confederation Council (and its military advisors) select forces that *can* cooperate. The component forces, usually skirmishers and light troops, operate each under its own command, but coordinated by the Confederation general on the scene. The Lookshy field forces and Nexus mercenaries provide the crucial crack troops and heavy units.

While everyone employs mercenaries, few trust them. The exceptions to the rule are Lookshy mercenaries (military advisors, trainers and elite troops), Guild mercenaries from Nexus (known for their professionalism) and the odd company that has managed to make a name for itself as reliable and trustworthy. Many countries also sponsor officer exchanges with Lookshy, sending gifted young officers to serve with the Seventh Legion for a while in order to learn tactics, training and logistics. Lookshy encourages these exchanges, valuing both the general improvement in other kingdoms' military forces and also the network of contacts (and informers) that it gains.

Naval Power

The Confederation has no formal navy, but every country has its own share of vessels for local defense and patrol, from swift-running galleys and corsairs to heavy, flat-bottomed river warships. Lookshy, Calin and several other kingdoms also possess a number of seaworthy vessels, the largest being the massive First Age warships of Lookshy, while Sijan's black-sailed galleys are recognizable throughout the Scavenger Lands and beyond. Captains work together unofficially, sharing patrol routes and intelligence, knowing that their fleets are the first line of defense against an attack by the Realm. They also wage a constant war against pirates, knowing that trade is the lifeblood of the Confederation. The Guild likewise maintains its own navies and attempts to crack down on smugglers and pirates, though it has a rather more ambivalent (and lethal) attitude toward unaffiliated traders than do the navies of separate countries. Profit is profit, after all.

Entering the Scavenger Lands

For centuries, ships from throughout the River Province were allowed to sail up the Yanaze to Nexus and beyond without inspection or papers, except for known robber barons. A recent incursion by Lintha pirates, who managed to sail some distance upriver and ravaged several towns and ports, has prompted Lookshy to begin searching every upriver-bound ship not bearing Guild or ambassadorial markings. Several smaller Confederation states have expressed concern about this new policy (and at least one is selling its ambassadorial markings at a significant price), but so far, no one has deliberately challenged Lookshy's ships. Of course, should Lookshy start doing more than checking for Lintha—inspecting goods, for instance, or restricting imports—then matters will change.

On land, kingdoms and city-states patrol their borders closely, and most people are alert and wary of strangers. Any outsider might be a criminal, a barbarian scout, an agent of the Fair Folk, a ghost or spirit, or simply an untrustworthy visitor from the kingdom next door—people of the Scavenger Lands keep their grudges fresh and fertile. Large groups of travelers can expect to be stopped by a border patrol, to have their goods inspected and taxed and to be shaken down for a reasonable amount in bribes. Individuals on major roads or waterways will probably be stopped and questioned and may be detained if they seem suspicious. Groups caught sneaking across borders will be treated as smugglers, spies or even invading forces. At least one petty war has been touched off by goat-raiding. Some places in the Hundred Kingdoms are ferociously paranoid about spies, demanding travel papers from all visitors to the area.

Scavenger Lords

The scavenger lord is a social class with its origins in the Scavenger Lands, but one that has rapidly spread across Creation in search of First Age relics—and any other items of interest. They are called many things: savant, explorer-prince, relic hunter, grave robber and less polite names. "Scavenger lord," however, is the term most frequently used to describe those who seek out lost secrets and attempt to restore the treasures of the First Age.

A successful scavenger lord is part merchant, part scholar, part mystic, part thief and part leader. Few of them work alone, as even the most subtle and cunning explorer-princes need someone to watch their backs. Digging up cities that are claimed by earth-spirits, haunted by the dead, watched over by insane gods or simply in the middle of disputed territory between two warring kingdoms requires a wide range of abilities. For supernatural problems, a scavenger lord might perform sacrifices and rituals to appease the divine or the dead. For practical ones, he might need hundreds of diggers and sifters. For political ones, he might have to depend on his social skills, his diplomatic abilities, his allies and appropriate payoffs to relevant authorities.

Many First Age devices such as daiklaves or powerbows are easy to understand, but others are far more enigmatic or difficult to turn toward a practical use. ("Practical" meaning, a use that will enhance the scavenger lord's personal power, allow his patron to conquer a wider territory or simply prove lucrative.) Successful scavenging involves not only finding

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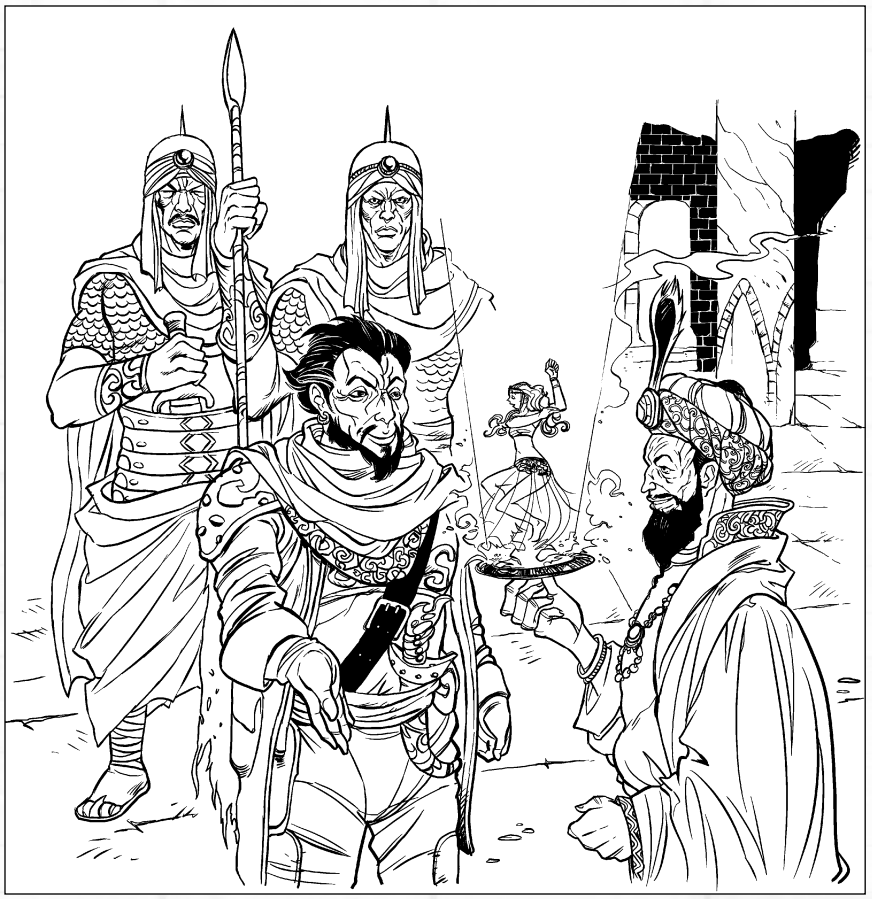
and identifying First Age devices, but also discovering a way to make a profit out of them.

The shabbiest sort of scavenger lord is a walking carnival of broken toys, half-assembled relics and tattered scrolls of ancient lore. She is willing to demonstrate a malfunctioning wonder of the First Age or spin a tale about a ruined city's past in return for a pitiful few coins or a night's lodging. More successful explorer-princes walk among the nobility, are respected by scholars, barter with princes and generals, and sleep on silken sheets paid for by their discoveries, before setting out on expeditions that will become the stuff of legend.

Becoming a scavenger lord's apprentice is a singular honor across the Scavenger Lands, except for in Sijan and Lookshy. In Sijan, scavenger lords are considered little better than grave robbers and despoilers of the honored dead, and are despised as such. In Lookshy, scavenging is considered a necessary but undignified job—rats might crawl in the gutter, but no warrior would ever seek to emulate them. Everywhere else in the Confederation, however, children dream of becoming an explorer-prince's apprentice, of traveling to far-off lands, risking their lives in ancient tombs, facing down horrendous ghosts and ghastly monsters, and rescuing the inevitable handsome or beautiful captive, depending on personal taste.

Many ruins have been thoroughly looted by successive waves of scavengers, but new discoveries still occur frequently enough to keep hope high and expectations bright. The Confederation is positively littered with ancient tombs, lost temples, forgotten shrines, ruined observatories, forgotten manses, haunted castles, cities depopulated by the Great Contagion, forges long abandoned by their Solar users, blood-soaked battlefields littered with the remains of First Age weapons and remnants of the past cut off by the Wyld from the rest of the Scavenger Lands. The reason the profession of scavenger lord was first practiced here is that there are so many promising—if potentially lethal—opportunities.

All of these places have their own peculiarities and dangers. Physical problems such as disrepair, decay, uncertain terrain and geographical location; problems resulting from the passage of time, such as finding that the city scheduled for exploration was drowned under a lake 100 years ago; traps and guardians, whether physical or mystical; Wyld-twisted predators or even Fair Folk and ravagers; Deathlords and shadowlands, a particular danger if the area being explored was the scene of a bloody battle; and, in some ways worst of all, other humans and other scavenger lords. When information comes to light regarding some past event or battle, or a particular clue giving the location of a long-hidden fortress, it is rarely confined to a single individual. Once word starts getting around, every scavenger lord in the vicinity is likely to take an interest—or to be waiting outside the area, in order to collect the booty after someone else has done the hard work of finding and retrieving it.



Scavenger lords collect everything. They don't make distinctions. Anything from the First Age is potentially valuable, either commercially or to a collector of antiquities. (The popular comparison of scavenger lords to hordes of locusts stripping the area bare has a strong basis in fact.) The two biggest areas of profit, however, are weapons and luxuries. Everyone buys weapons, and the privately rich are always ready to buy luxuries.

Weapons from the First Age, whether meant for Exalted or un-Exalted troops, command a huge price tag—and huge potential danger, from the enemies of the potential buyers, who might be prepared to take lethal steps to prevent certain items ending up in the hands of their foes. The Seventh Legion's purchasing agents deal in good faith with anyone who offers them goods, but they're very low payers. Buyers willing to offer more might also be willing to cheat or murder the seller. An experienced

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scavenger lord knows where and how to dispose of his findings. Life-enhancing artifacts, such as light crystals, stoves that burn without fuel, magnificent First Age clothing and so on, all command excellent prices from wealthy individuals. They rarely bring the astronomical profits that military hardware commands, but they also avoid the risks that go hand in hand with those profits.

The Big Score

While it might seem a legendary and heroic thing to do, experienced explorer-princes dread discovering truly unique or world-shaking artifacts. Not only are these devices often cursed or incredibly dangerous to handle, they also attract the wrong sort of attention. Having Anathema, God-Bloods, deathknights, Realm agents and every ambitious being in the vicinity descend on a quiet, profitable little excavation is not what a scavenger lord wants—either as a scholar and archaeologist or as a profiteer and tomb robber. Even the most scrupulous and virtuous of Exalted might feel moved to interfere for the best of reasons, which can result in the scavenger lord having to escape from an area that has suddenly become ground zero for Confederation-spanning battles—and without anything to show for it.

Even if a scavenger lord should safely excavate such an item, she is then faced with the problem of what to do with it. Anyone with the wealth and resources to buy such an item is likely to be unscrupulous to the highest degree and will probably want the scavenger lord dead in order to keep the whole thing secret. The safest thing might simply be to bury the item, walk away and forget it. Of course, there is always the option of using it to carve out a kingdom, and this has been the stuff of legends in the past…

Exalted in the Scavenger Lands

Tolerance is the watchword throughout much of the Scavenger Lands, and the Immaculate Philosophy commands little respect outside of Lookshy—and even there, it is the local variant of the Philosophy that holds sway, rather than standard Realm dogma. This tolerance doesn't make the Confederation *safe*, however. Myths of the Anathema are as common here as they are elsewhere, and Solars are as likely to be feared and hated as they are to be praised or worshiped. Even those who suspect that the Immaculate Order and the stories of the past are less than accurate still consider the Anathema dangerous. After all, gods are common in the Scavenger Lands, and they're extremely dangerous.

Lunar Anathema are known threats and have led barbarian hordes to vex the Scavenger Lands in the past. Terrestrial Exalted, while feared, are more accepted—everyone knows of Lookshy's Dragon-Blooded and has seen them fight for the Confederation. Really, when one considers all the gods, God-Bloods, Fair Folk, Wyld-twisted mutants, mortal sorcerers and other extraordinary individuals in the area, a Solar doesn't necessarily stand out much. Many can get away with being considered just another powerful magic being.

Tombs of the Anathema

At the time of the Usurpation, some Solar Exalted were taken to Sijan and entombed in deep graves there; others were buried where they fell. Their tombs were raised by Earth-aspected Terrestrial Exalted and surrounded by terrible enchantment and traps, to keep the slain Exalts trapped in their own graves. Because a large number of Exalted who escaped the great betrayal made their last stand in the River Province, many of them are buried there.

Some of these tombs were carefully marked or obvious, like the ones in Nexus. Others were hidden, to prevent grave robbers or Solar loyalists from finding them. After all this time, most of the region's 20 or so tombs are long forgotten. Half a dozen of them lie in or close to Nexus—and are actually part of the city's infrastructure and watched by the Emissary's agents—while a dozen more are scattered throughout the Scavenger Lands. Some have been looted, but many are still inviolate, as impregnable as when they were erected over 1,000 years ago.

While the Wyld Hunt can't work openly in the Scavenger Lands, agents of the Bronze Faction can operate incognito. In extreme cases, the Hunt might secretly enter the Confederation in order to finish off particularly dangerous Anathema, possibly receiving deniable assistance from local authorities who want the Solar gone.

There are legends of Exalted who dwell deep in the forests or high in the mountains, or even hidden in the cities, who have kept their identities secret in order to avoid persecution. Since the disappearance of the Empress, such stories have grown more common and more credible. Whatever the truth of the tales, there are certainly those in the Scavenger Lands who believe them, and who might be willing to help a Solar in need, however dangerous it might be.

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Timeline of the Scavenger Lands

Realm Year	Event
-1	The Seventh Legion, under the command of Chumyo Nefvarin Gilshalos, arrives at Deheleshen to discover it has been razed by the Fair Folk. The legion bivouacs there and, following the final command of the region's daimyo, begins to fortify its position.
1	Great Contagion ends.
20	Engineers of the Seventh Legion begin construction of the city of Lookshy on the ruins of Deheleshen to house and protect the refugee settlement that has formed there around the Legion's fortifications.
45	Emissaries of the Scarlet Empress approach the leaders of various Scavenger Land city-states, demanding oaths of fealty. Several cities swear their allegiance. Most, including Lookshy, do not. Threats of reprisal convince a number of additional cities to change their position and sign on.
52	The Council of Entities takes control of Nexus.
57	First invasion of the region by Realm forces is launched from coastal city-states loyal to the Realm. The forces of the Fourth Imperial Legion begin a systematic campaign of conquest, while notably bypassing the entrenched forces of the Seventh Legion at Lookshy. Scattered resistance quickly intensifies, and the Fourth Legion soon discovers that it controls only the area its forces currently occupy, and often not even that.
69	After enduring 12 years of increasingly brutal guerilla resistance, the Fourth Legion retreats to the Realm's allied city-states.
75	The Realm invades the Scavenger Lands with four full legions. Lookshy is besieged, and Nexus itself is occupied. Resistance throughout the region is determined but disorganized.
76	The imperial forces laying siege to Lookshy are obliterated by the discharge of a powerful First Age weapon and a subsequent sally by Seventh Legion troops. The Seventh Legion endures a forced march to the location of present-day Great Forks, where it engages and destroys the Fourth Imperial Legion. After nearly two months of occupation, the Emissary of the Council of Entities declares that Realm forces must withdraw from Nexus as, according to the Incunabulum, none may keep an army within the city. In response, the Council itself is attacked and two of its members are slain by Realm soldiers, who are themselves brutally slaughtered by the Emissary. Within five days, all Realm officers above the rank of talonlord are dead. The surviving legionnaires vote to end the occupation and accept exile when it is offered to them. The Realm again withdraws its forces from the Scavenger Lands.
83	Ships of the Imperial Navy engage in allegedly unofficial and unsanctioned attacks on merchant vessels near the Scavenger Lands. In response, various Scavenger Land nations issue letters of marque against the Realm and begin constructing their own warships.
88	The forces of the Realm invade the region for a third time. Seven full legions are fielded by the Scarlet Empire, including the Empress's Guard, and are supported by local allied forces. The military aggression of the Realm is turned back, though with great difficulty. The field forces of Lookshy pin down several imperial flights, while the combined forces of Melevhil and Nathir conduct a guerilla campaign that decimates the Realm's remaining forces.
89	The Empress's Guard is destroyed on the fields outside of Melevhil, in part due to the defection of Taimyo Vondy Beulen, his command staff and several dragons of troops loyal to the Seventh Legion. This battle marks the last instance Realm troops are deployed in force against the Scavenger Lands.
95	The various free city-states of the former River Province form a loose confederation, signing a treaty of mutual aid and support. The membership of this League of Many Rivers includes Lookshy, Nexus, Sijan and more than a dozen other Scavenger Land cities. For simplicity's sake, borders for the area's nations are based on the old administrative districts of the Dragon-Blooded Shogunate.
99	Brem Marst forms the Guild.
103	In order to quell dissent and frustration in the Realm's Threshold satrapies and client states, the Scarlet Empress founds the Deliberative.
104-109	Coastal states of the former River Province foreswear their fealty to the Scarlet Empire and petition to join the nascent League of Many Rivers. After much deliberation, these states are allowed to join the League. Protests from the Blessed Isle are derisively ignored.
117	The Guild moves its base of operations from Great Forks to Nexus.
174	The Nine Duchies rebel against the Realm. The rebellion fails, however.

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Timeline of the Scavenger Lands

Realm Year	Event
263	Tensions heighten between the Laris and Velen administrative districts over water rights concerning the Sandy River. In truth, this conflict harks back to First Age border disputes between the two districts.
265	Velen administrative district militia forces seize control of a number of irrigation and viaduct pumping stations along the Sandy River and destroy several others. Laris retaliates by destroying the dikes at both Lowground and Sutter's Marsh, flooding the towns. War erupts between the two powers and draws in most of the regional states.
301	House Iselsi sponsors a quasi-official Realm invasion of the region that ends in disaster. The resultant scandal catalyzes the fall of the Great House.
364	The Arczeckh Horde invades the Scavenger Lands from the South, ravaging several cities of the Hundred Kingdoms. The Wyld barbarians are routed by a coalition of Hundred Kingdom forces, mercenaries hired by the Guild and a field force of Lookshy regulars and retreat to the wilderness.
547	The Fair Folk and the forces of the Wyld assault the Hundred Kingdoms.
554	The Fair Folk are driven back.
557	In the wake of the Fair Folk invasion, representatives from the Scavenger Lands' major powers forge a stronger defensive alliance, the Confederation of Rivers.
748	The Autocrat of Thorns dies. His younger son conspires with the Realm to invade the Confederation of Rivers in exchange for the throne of Thorns. The Realm sends a complement of Dragon-Blooded "advisors" to aid the younger son in his bid for power. Afterward, the Scarlet Empress legitimizes the usurper. The Realm then sends additional "advisory" forces to Thorns, along with a large supply of First Age armaments, under the pretense of loaning them to the Realm's new ally.
752	The army of Thorns, bulwarked by Realm troops, invades the western states of the Confederation of Rivers. The war quickly turns against Thorns, as its soldiers are unused to war, while the troops of the Scavenger Lands' heartlands have been hardened by the region's constant state of conflict. Urged on by his Dragon-Blooded advisors, the Autocrat of Thorns has little choice but to pour more and more jade and lives into the conflict.
754	The forces of Thorns and their Dragon-Blooded allies are defeated at the Battle of Mishaka. With its military annihilated, Thorns teeters on the brink of civil war. The Autocrat maintains his rule only thanks to his Dragon-Blooded allies.
763	The Scarlet Empress vanishes.
764	The forces of the Deathlord known as the Mask of Winters easily conquer Thorns.
768	The present day.

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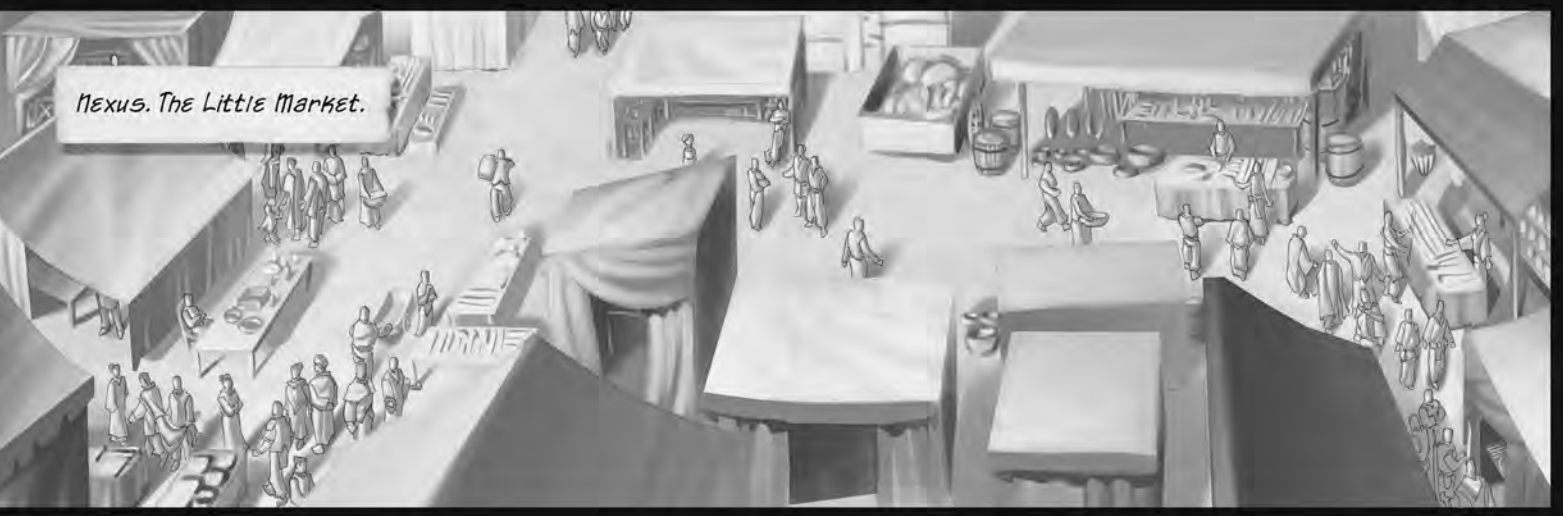

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CHAPTER TWO
THE HEART OF THE SCAVENGER LANDS

On a peninsula jutting out between the Gray and Yellow Rivers where they join to become the Yanaze stands the renowned city of Nexus, called various epithets as positive as the Threshold Jewel and as negative as the River Harlot's Legs. It is the largest city in the East and one of the most populous cities anywhere. Almost a million people shelter behind its walls, despite its dubious reputation. For, in addition to being a wealthy and cosmopolitan trading port, Nexus is also a poisonous stew of diseases and home to the most brutal and unforgiving oligarchy in Creation.

History of Nexus

No city becomes the wealthiest and vilest population center in Creation overnight. Yet, just as Nexus occupies a position of geographical importance, it occupies a position of historical importance. The city has shaped the destiny of the Scavenger Lands in numerous ways. Its citizens have fought in many of the major wars of the last 500 years, its mercantile families have bound Creation together in nets of trade, and its leaders have successfully thwarted the Realm's ambitions on several occasions. So it is with cities at the crossroads of the world: They also stand athwart the Loom of Fate, changing the destinies of great and small alike. The rulers of Nexus have often sought to use their geographical importance to affect the course of history.

Hollow

The origins of that quest can be discovered in the ruins of the First Age city that lie below the streets of modern Nexus. Scholars believe it to be the city of Hollow. An important trade and university town before the Anathema were put down, Hollow was the capital of the whole River Province. The original center of Hollow eventually became the district of Firewander, and many of the most graceful buildings of Nexus are actually structures surviving from Hollow.

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Hollow was largely destroyed during the wars of the Usurpation. Several wrecked buildings in Nighthammer demonstrate that a massive battle took place there. Even 1,500 years later, their slagged ruins withstand wrecking crews and Essence cannons. Six tombs of the Anathema stand in Nexus, acting as landmarks for modern city residents and warning of the horrors of earlier times.

Contagion and Renewal

Modern Nexus owes its origins to a later period in history. After the Great Contagion ended and Firewander District was lost when the invading raksha set off a Wyld-weapon in the old provincial capitol, survivors from Hollow and refugees from other lands cleared the worst of the rubble from the streets and canals of the ancient city. Numerous small villages appeared in the ruins and sought ways to rebuild their lives and their communities. Some were simple democracies; others were little more than organized crime gangs; still others were treasure hunters, scouring the ruins for First Age devices. At first, the older parts of Hollow were unsafe, and the refugees concentrated their settlements in and above the shallows at the western end of the peninsula. These early settlements consisted of a dozen houses surrounded by a ditch and a wooden wall. Most communities distrusted each other greatly, since they all wanted a share in the plunder from the old city upon which they lived.

By the time the Scarlet Empress took the throne of the Blessed Isle, the swampland villages had formed a single community, which took the name of Nexus. Nexus had begun to be a trading community as first the Nighthammer Pool and then the Nexus Pool were reopened to trade after a hiatus of centuries. It took another 50 years before the villages of Cinnabar, Sentinel's Hill and Bastion joined the Nexus townships. Firewander was only reluctantly persuaded to join.

The Emissary

In RY 52, the Emissary made his appearance. Robed in white and wearing a silver mask, the Emissary claimed to speak for a body called the Council of Entities, which now laid claim to the city of Nexus. Those who opposed the Council, it claimed, would die. Some leaders attacked the Emissary directly and died horrible deaths: choking on their own blood, being suddenly turned inside out or turning their own weapons on themselves. Other leaders who ignored the Emissary's proclamations were killed by more mundane methods: poison, garroting, arrows from dark alleys and kidney stabs from hired assassins. By the end of the year, the Council of Entities—its will enforced by the Emissary—had control of Nexus.

The Council claims not to be a government and that it rules by suggestion. Visitors sometimes see this as a deliriarchy (i.e., rule by the insane). Most citizens know better: While less than five percent of the city population receives any

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salary from the Council Office building in Nexus District or works in the Council Tower on Sentinel's Hill, perhaps 15 percent of the citizenry of Nexus are involved in spying and informing on their neighbors. In addition, the Council's decrees often include a mechanism to compel obedience, in the form of wages paid to a mercenary company to act as enforcers. Nor is the Council without magical aid. While individual Councilors have at times been mortal, the Emissary has served on the Council since its first appearance, and numerous beings in the presence of the Emissary have died horrific deaths.

Realm Invasions

The Emissary and the Council proved their control over Nexus in the next 50 years, as the Realm committed troops on three separate occasions to the conquest of the River Province. In the first invasion, the Fourth Legion of the Realm engaged with the River states in a haphazard way and was forced to withdraw after 12 years. Nexus hired mercenary companies for the defense of the city but never actually put those forces into the field. The Fourth Legion had other problems and chose not to attack the largest city in the River Province.

In the second invasion, the Realm sent in four legions, one of which actually occupied Nexus in RY 75. After two months of occupation, the Emissary politely informed the legions that it was time for them to depart, as the laws of the city forbade the presence of an army within the walls. In response, the Seventh Legion attacked the Emissary and the Council, successfully slaying two Councilors, though all of its assault troops were themselves killed in the attempt. Over the next five days, every Imperial officer of the rank of talonlord or higher died mysteriously—the commanding officer of the Seventh Legion died choking on his own leg, which he had eaten from the toes up, right to the bone. On the fifth day, the surviving legionaries surrendered and accepted exile when it was offered to them. Denied the right to return to the Realm for their cowardice and ignominy, some of them later formed the Nightarrows mercenary company.

For the next 10 years, Nexus was only peripherally involved in the war with the Realm. The Council occasionally issued letters of marque and reprisal against Imperial shipping but mostly went about its business. Nexus again hired mercenaries at the time of the third Realm invasion in RY 88 and this time sent them into the field rather than waiting for an attack to come against it. Nexus-hired troops were present at the battle of Melevhil, and Nexus hosted the conclave of River Province states that led to the formation the League of Many Rivers in RY 95.

The Guild

With the political independence of Nexus and the other River Province states now firmly established, the city got back to the business of trade and industry. By RY 110, Nexus had the largest, most sophisticated and most successful iron-working operations in Creation. It also had the largest docks complex in the East and the greatest number of mercantile houses and factors' offices. Close to the point where ocean-going vessels could no longer travel upstream, Nexus made sense as a transshipment point and transport hub, where goods could move easily from river barge or wagon to deep-water cargo hull, and vice versa. It made sense that the Guild, which was then a growing network of traders and artisans, should petition the Council of Entities for the right to move its headquarters within the walls of Nexus. The Council accepted, and the Guild moved into its present headquarters building a few years later, in RY 117.

The collaboration was a natural one. To all appearances, the Council believed in minimal government, maximal revenue and free trade. The Guild, meanwhile, was using its capital to break down trade barriers and disrupt obstreperous governments and working to make huge profits for its hierarchs and merchant princes. The Guild could work out of Nexus without fear of being reined in, while the Council could expect generous revenues from an organization bringing its massive profits home. It was a match made in Yu-Shan—or Malfeas, depending on your perspective.

There were no major disruptions in Nexus itself over the next several hundred years, though several wars broke out in neighboring territories. The Emissary put down the Nighthammer Revolt of RY 373 personally, slaying hundreds in a street-by-street action. The Hooded Executioners did little more than haul bodies away for a month. Mostly, the city remained calm.

Present Circumstances

Nexus greeted the news of the Empress's disappearance with its usual shrug and raised prices. The news of the fall of Thorns to the Deathlord Mask of Winters caused much more consternation, but similarly rising prices. For the most part, Nexus goes about its business as it always has, certain that nothing is really likely to change. The Council will remain in charge, the Guild will continue to make profits, and the corpses of the naïve, the clumsy and the stupid will still litter the streets at dawn.

Geography

Nexus's position at the confluence of two great rivers helps the city accumulate wealth and excess population. For every corpse sent to Sijan or flushed out of the city using the canal sluices, a dozen more individuals approach the gates, hoping to gain entry as new residents. Farmhands come in from the country looking for work. Barbarians come, hoping to join a mercenary company. Thieves and merchants—and who can tell the difference these days?—line up to pay the entry fees. Some turn back at the noise and smell, but most enter, fearful of what would be said of them at home: that they went to Nexus but turned back before they ever got there.

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Surrounding Countryside

Such malicious gossip forgets that the writ of the Council runs beyond the city walls. Fully 30 miles out from the eastern gates of the city lies a subtle arc, invisible to the naked eye and yet marked by a line of crudely carved statues of the Emissary. Within that line is the city-state of Nexus. Beyond that line, anything goes.

The countryside of Nexus is neither beautiful nor graceful. No pretty villages or dignified market towns dot the landscape. Instead, teahouses and ill-kept hostels mark the three main roads into Nexus every five miles, interspersed with large estates with high walls for the wealthy. Heavily taxed to keep them from competing with the hostelries within the city, these businesses are designed to encourage people to hurry on to the city. Visitors often see chain gangs of slaves and animals keeping the roads in repair and tending paddies for growing "swamp rice," the staple diet of the city's poor. Chewy and barely edible, swamp rice will grow even in the polluted waters around Nexus, though its prolonged ingestion tends to shorten the life span of whoever eats it. Much of the countryside around Nexus is flat plain or rolling hills, and nearly all of its territory is terraced or otherwise modified to support crops, whether swamp rice in the valleys or apples, peaches and nuts on higher slopes.

Ten miles out from the city walls on each of the roads stands a plain black column topped by a bust of the Emissary. These Stones of Exile represent the outer border of the city's judicial policy. Anyone exiled by the Council must be beyond these markers by sundown, or he will die. Usually, exiles are granted an additional 24 hours to pass by the outer boundary statues. The ground around the Stones of Exile is sometimes littered with corpses, however, and exiles generally hurry along as quickly as possible to the frontier. It is best not to depend on the Council's mercies.

Flood Control

None of the rivers around Nexus is particularly tame. The Yellow often breaks its banks, sending a sluggish wall of water two or three feet high through the low-lying streets and canals of the city. The Gray floods less frequently, but to a greater extent, usually flushing seven to 10 feet of water into Nexus. The Yanaze floods least of all, but a storm swell from the Inland Sea can put 12 to 15 feet of briny wash into the streets with virtually no warning at all.

The Council might choose to do something about flood control in such an environment, but it does nothing. The region around Nexus is amply supplied with flood control systems, many of which date from the First Age. Unfortunately for the mortals of Nexus, many of these systems require Essence to operate. Moreover, they seem to be dependent upon the existence and operation of two great dams on the Yellow and Gray Rivers. While the remains of these dams do exist, the Council has put much effort into seeing that they are neither repaired nor used.

The Yellow River dam's primary function these days is as the only bridge carrying cargo and people from north to south. Standing on piers 600 feet above the river, the roadway is as white and perfect and imperishable as it was in the First Age. Between the piers are six channels or grooves for carrying the bulk of the dam up out of the riverbed, where it has been hidden away since before the Contagion. Since calling the dam into existence out of the riverbed would close the river to boat traffic, and create a lake upstream that would extend as far as Marita, and drown Great Forks beneath 50 feet of water, the Council of Entities has forbidden anyone from seeking to raise the dam.

The Gray River dam, though apparently made of the same imperishable material as the Yellow River dam, was blown open by some great force, and now lies in ruins about 30 miles south of Nexus. Approximately 400 miles downstream, a huge jade glyph set in the riverbed can apparently prevent storms from flooding the Yanaze. No one knows, however, if this First Age mechanism will also impede river traffic, so no one has tried to turn it on.

Walls and Rivers

The city of Nexus itself is defined by its walls and rivers. On the north side of the city lies the Yellow River, while on the southwest is the Gray River. To the east is the city wall, only 15 feet high and punctured by 11 gates. It is less a defensive barrier than a tool for collecting entry fees for the Council—a fee of one silver dinar is assessed on each person or animal entering Nexus, and a fee of one dinar per 10 dirhams of value is assessed on all cargo. Similar fees are also charged at the two main dock areas of Nexus. On the Yellow River, the main port is Nexus Pool, lined on the riverside by an island referred to as the Outer Docks and on the city side by the so-called Inner Docks. Cargoes landed at Outer Docks are usually being transferred to other vessels and will not be sold in Nexus directly. Cargoes landed on the Inner Docks are destined for Nexus markets. In Nighthammer Pool, on the southwest side of the city, the islands of Outer Nighthammer and Dungtown serve as transshipment points for mercantile companies and businesses. The Nighthammer Docks hold cargoes of metal ores intended for the smelters and forges of Nexus.

The Flooding Hills

Between the city walls and the Yanaze lies a city of canals and hills. The western end of the city was once a fetid lowland swamp, and early inhabitants canalized the swamp and filled in the campi, or blocks, on which the city now stands. As a result, many canals crisscross the Nexus and Nighthammer Districts. The largest of these is the Grand Canal, running from northeast to southwest between Nexus Pool and Nighthammer Pool. Approximately 20 yards wide and four yards deep, it provides a clear path through the city for poled barges, oared boats and gondolas.

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Overhanging bridges prevent any vessel with a mast from making the trip.

The eastern end of the city has many fewer canals, since it is dominated by Cinnabar Hill, Bastion Hill and Sentinel's Hill. Firewander lies in a pocket valley defined by these three rocky prominences. The East Canal runs roughly parallel to the Grand Canal and the City Wall, but it is narrower and grimmer and less fun to travel. The Night Canal, which passes through a tunnel drilled directly under the Cinnabar District, is wide enough for only two gondolas or a single barge. A whole series of canals run through Firewander. Many of them were originally intended to be reflecting pools for Shogunate-era government buildings, but now they are at least partially ensconced within the Wyld zone that afflicts this district.

As a result of these canals, the poorer sections of the city flood regularly, while the wealthier neighborhoods never do. Moreover, since the poor tend to live in shoddily constructed houses of salvaged wood and straw, poor neighborhoods tend to be swept away in floods. Meanwhile, the floods often wash the grime from the surviving First Age buildings, leaving those bastions of wealth and privilege sparkling and clean.

Architecture

The months immediately following a flood are a wonderful time to observe the city's architecture. As the poor and middle classes rebuild their neighborhoods, they tend to throw up structures of wood, straw, salvaged iron and salvaged stone. Nexus is not a city for professional architects, by and large. Only the wealthiest can afford buildings that favor form over function.

Scattered throughout the city, but concentrated for the most part in the Nexus and Firewander Districts, are a number of First Age buildings and roads. Often six to 10 stories tall and composed of numerous towers joined at the upper floors with bridges, the graceful and airy structures soar above their neighborhoods and provide landmarks to visitors and locals alike. Constructed of a yellow-cream colored stone, they are decorated with arabesques and floral motifs. Many seem to be of one piece, and not even the Guild's finest artisans have successfully dismantled or replicated a single First Age building in Nexus. The Guild makes its home in the second largest tower in the city, a 12-story building at the corners of the Knife and Onion Canals, and a two-minute walk from a pulley-car station.

Poor Man's Breath

The higher one lives and works above the ground in Nexus, the greater one's wealth and the longer one is likely to live. Not only are the streets and canals not safe because of crime, they are often filled with a fetid black fog from the city's smelters and iron forges. For this reason, Nexus is sometimes called the City of Black Snow, since a constant rain of ash falls on the western half of the city. The fog, called the "poor man's breath," also chokes many inhabitants before they reach middle age. It becomes particularly bad during Ascending and Resplendent Air, when the winds tend to carry the fog right into the heart of the city.

The Undercity

The fog also sinks through a number of cave openings and fills the levels of the city under the Sentinel's Hill and Cinnabar Districts. Here, the heights of the city also conceal its depths, where a series of underground levels, passages and markets lit by torches provide additional housing for the city's poor and lower middle classes. Three major routes pass all the way through the Undercity. The first, running east to west, is the Night Canal, which is lined with brothels catering to the mercenary trade. Mushroom Way, lying beneath the Parko Llana, the largest green space within the city walls, is home to the city's drug trade. Running north to south between the Night Canal and the surface-level Switchback Street is the Wind's Way, which is large enough to ventilate the system and prevent the caverns from becoming too stifling.

Transport

The most basic form of transportation in Nexus are one's own two feet. The streets of Nexus run up stairs and down ramps, zigzag on hillsides to keep them more or less level, meander beside sewage-choked canals and splash through muddy pools under overhanging laundry. In some places, public thoroughfares climb ladders up to rooftop walkways and shuddering suspension bridges, or plunge down steep ramps to underground plazas to rush between white stone columns supporting First Age structures. Couriers and coolie-boys haul messages and goods in shoulder satchels and on carry-yokes along all these routes. On more or less flat routes, wheelbarrows and small carts supplement the human labor necessary to move goods. Yeddim, horses and large animal-drawn vehicles are confined by decree to the largest, most important streets.

The web of streets follows no set pattern or guiding principle, except that many streets vary in width considerably over relatively short stretches. Alleys tend to be narrow enough that a drunkard bounces from wall to wall; ways are wide enough for two or three to walk side by side; streets are usually wide enough for a cart; avenues are wide enough for two carts. Yet some alleys widen into streets for a hundred paces, creating a courtyard in the midst of a slum, while some streets narrow into an alley to create chokepoints (and escape routes) in certain neighborhoods.

Pulley-Car Lines

One of the simplest methods of transportation around Nexus consists of the three surviving pulley-car lines that crisscross the city from east to west. The main line, the Wander Street Line, connects the Nighthammer Docks with the center of Firewander, very near the edge of the Wyld

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zone surrounding the old provincial capitols. A second line, the Cinnabar-Nighthammer Line, joins the same docks with the Cinnabar District, near the center of the mercenary barracks. The third line, called the Riverlaine Line, runs almost from west to east through the city from River Park almost to the city wall in the Bastion District.

Each pulley-car line consists of a pair of massive drum-wheels at each end of the line, with a jade-steel cable strung between the four wheels. Somewhere along each line, the jade-steel cable goes around another drum-wheel, which puts a bend in the line and creates necessary tension throughout the system. Below ground, troops of hired workers turn massive capstans attached to the end-wheels and cause the jade-steel cable to be in constant motion, endlessly rotating from one end of the system to the other. Cars built of wood and metal, and equipped with brakes and cable clamps, can then attach themselves to the cable anywhere on the line, and likewise stop anywhere along the line. Usually, each line has six to ten official stops, but travelers can pay an extra fee to the conductor or clamp-man aboard, who will stop at a chosen location for debarkation. All passengers must board at a designated stop, however. By Council decree, the pulley cars may stop to pick up passengers only at the official stations.

Travel by pulley car is slow and tedious, but all three lines stop within 100 yards of one another in the Big Market, and all three also make the big climb over the ridge of Sentinel's Hill and the Cinnabar District.

Canal System

Provided one plans to stay within the western half of the city, hiring a gondola is a faster and more efficient method of travel, as more than 20 miles of canals connect the Nexus and Nighthammer Districts. Most merchants prefer using boats to transport their cargoes to porters in the streets, and most houses have both a canal address and a street address.

Traveling in the canal system can be both hazardous and exhilarating. The waters are shallow, the ways are narrow, and nearly everyone is in a hurry. Agents working for various merchant houses often overturn the boats of their competitors. In addition, the rivers push water through the canals at quite a speed. Therefore, boats left unattended or unguided may be smashed to pieces, before they are gradually flushed out of Nexus and into the Yanaze through the Canal Sluice. More than one life has been saved by the pack of boys who cluster by the Canal Sluice, who rescue (and then ransom) anything of value before it can be swept downriver.

Government

Some outsiders believe, mistakenly, that Nexus is a happy anarchy. Others regard it as a mercantile city with limited government. Actual citizens tend to be more conscious of the truth: A brutal oligarchy governs Nexus, through a combination of secret police, paid informants and magical totalitarianism. This government ruthlessly promulgates "Civilities" designed to strip the rights of the poor, in order to maximize the tax revenues of the Council of Entities and create a positive trading environment for the wealthy. By limiting participation in government to a very small elite, the Council imposes a learned helplessness on the lower classes, and by placing virtually no limits on economic activity, the Council forces every enterprise, no matter how minor, to be profitable or to be destroyed. Escape from this intense combination of despair and competition is nearly impossible. Still, it takes visitors at least a little while to see that this arrangement is not an unfortunate accident or by-product of Nexus' history, but rather the result of deliberate and careful design.

The Emissary

The Emissary seems to be the being most responsible for the present state of Nexus. First appearing in RY 52 issuing the series of decrees now called the Dogma, the Emissary is a white-robed, androgynous being wearing a silver mask. Most scholars of such things (who tend to work at some distance from Nexus, because the Council takes a dim view of too much investigation of its affairs) believe that the Emissary is the same being today who first appeared in RY 52. A minority, however, believes the robes and mask to be First Age devices capable of cloaking any individual with the illusion of being the Emissary.

The Emissary is the public face of the Council. While other members are known to the public at large and are frequently seen coming and going from the Council Tower on Sentinel's Hill, the Emissary seems to be the only one constantly available. Usually, the Emissary is at the Council Tower from dawn until mid-morning, when it travels downhill to the Council Offices near the Big Market. There, it announces any new decrees issued since dawn by the Council before retiring to its "courtroom" to harshly mediate any disputes between merchants. In the early afternoon, it moves to the center of the Big Market and in a booming voice announces any new decrees. Afterward, it returns to the Council Offices, where scribes post the final version of the day's decrees on a notice board outside the Offices. The Emissary then returns to the Council Tower, where it hears non-mercantile disputes for a while, departing from public view some hours after sunset. From time to time, the Emissary will vanish for several days, before appearing suddenly (and occasionally violently) in the midst of conspirators or criminals. Before it kills anyone in public, the Emissary always cites the Dogma or Civility under which it is empowering itself to act. The Emissary has never been bribed, or visibly wounded, or anything other than perfectly loyal to the Dogma and the present version of the Civilities.

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The Council of Entities

No one is quite sure whether the Emissary is subordinate to or in charge of the Council of Entities. It hardly matters. The Council's members are individually and collectively responsible for writing the decrees called Civilities, so the governance of Nexus, such as it is, is in their hands.

The Council itself rarely meets more than three times a month. When it does, the Councilors usually devote a great deal of time to settling issues that have arisen between themselves, and issue a block of Civilities in a state of rare unanimity. Decrees issued by a meeting of the Council often make the most sense and are the most carefully phrased. ("A ship landing at the Outer Nexus Docks shall pay at the Harbor Master's Office one silver dinar for each mast, three dinars for each paddle wheel and one dinar for each ton of cargo she carries. Any ship that fails to pay within 24 hours of landing is to be seized by mercenaries of the Hooded Executioners, and the vessel and its cargo are to be auctioned in the Big Market. Ten percent of the sale price will go to the Executioners, and the remainder will be delivered to the Council Offices. The Harbor Master will pay a five percent fine to the Council Offices for each ship so seized and auctioned.")

The rest of the time, each Councilor may issue any decree she likes, whether it relates to her area of responsibility or not. Many of these Civilities are prosaic—"No one shall interfere with the workmen building the new library," or, "The road repair crew on Luna's Walk shall not be abused with foul language or physical violence on pain of slow and painful death." Sometimes, however, they seem highly frivolous—"When one takes a meal, he must never do so in darkness." Many Councilors have large townhouses with gardens in Bastion or on Sentinel's Hill, and they often attend gatherings around the city. While the Emissary has not proved open to corruption, the same cannot be said of the other Councilors, who take bribes and issue decrees accordingly. It is no wonder that Councilors are among the wealthiest individuals in the city.

The one check upon their corruption is that any Councilor may issue any decree. Therefore, a Councilor may issue a decree on behalf of a fisherman requiring all single persons to eat thabi fish before sundown, but another Councilor may issue a different decree requiring all single persons to abstain from thabi fish for three days. Whichever decree was most recently issued is the only one enforced, so, the fisherman may be left with nothing but a market stall filled with rotting thabi. Laws based on bribery that benefit only one or two individuals rarely remain on the Civilities list for long.

Current Membership

The members of the Council are a varied lot. The bronze tablet commemorating fallen Councilors reveals widely different predecessors: Some were mortals, others were spirits, and others were Exalted or God-Blooded. Artisans, merchant princes and the independently wealthy fill the list. Few ever got the job because of their parents, though some were the nieces and nephews of other Councilors.

The present Council, as usual, has nine members including the Emissary. Their titles have not changed in centuries. The Emissary usually appears to be first among equals—though at times he appears as a mere servant of the other Councilors.

Three Councilors control Nexus's trade and foreign policy. The August Councilor of the Eclipse runs the city's docks and waterways, and the collection of taxes on them. The current office-holder is a former Harbor Master, Thalevar, and after the Emissary, he is the most regularly seen Councilor. His home is on Sentinel's Hill, where he hosts gatherings for visiting dignitaries. Some see him as the unofficial head of state and director of foreign policy. Ephiselle, as Midnight Queen, oversees the throngs of informants and spies who watch Nexus for the Council. It is unlawful to write, sing or speak about her office within the city walls. The Dawn Sergeant, a woman named Pellicia, hires and commands the mercenary companies residing in Nexus and sees to city's overall defense.

Three manage the city's public business and serve as guardians of domestic policy. Brueghel, the Evening Master, holds sway over the city's secret and public business. He maintains the city archives and libraries and licenses all teachers and educational institutions in Nexus. Hayle, the Midday Husband, has charge over artistic expression and public entertainment in the city, as well as the city's overall good health. Among other things, he monitors the sewer workers and hires entertainers for the theaters and the Plaza of Rebirth. Master Gen, Minister of Ways, examines the District Assayers who collect the city's taxes, tariffs and duties.

Then there is Kratz, the Astrologer. A woman of ostentatious tastes and strange behavior, Kratz has successfully predicted everything from famine and riot to sudden price shifts and bountiful harvests through her knowledge of the heavens, so the Council tolerates her extreme behavior. Though the Civilities of Kratz often seem to be some of most ridiculous ones issued by the Council, they often prove to make perfect sense in hindsight. In spite of her rather nebulous responsibilities, she commands the largest entourage of all the Councilors.

Last of all is Udelph, the Doctor, who allegedly speaks for the city's ordinary folk. His Civilities end feuds and promote harmony in the city. In practice, however, the Doctor can be just as ruthless as his colleagues. On his orders, officials raze city blocks and exile families to prevent disease. Many compare him to the surgeon who recommends cutting over changes in diet or medication, who demands payment no matter if his patient lives or dies.

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Taxes, Tariffs and Rents

Perhaps the most important piece of business the Council conducts annually is the review of the city's taxes, licensing fees, tariffs and rents. First are the entry and exit tariffs. Every person, every ship and every cart entering or leaving the city is assessed a small fee relative to its value. These taxes affect every person differently—but largely, it is a light burden to bear. Yet, the Council collects these fees from everyone: Failure to pay usually bars that individual from entering or exiting the city permanently. Those already outside die suddenly if they violate the ban, while those inside face the prospect of exile if they leave.

Property taxes form the second category of revenue for the Council. The District Assayers visit each property in Nexus at least once a year, sometimes more often in the event of construction or a major flood, and set a tax value on the property. One full season after the assessment, the owner of that property must pay the assessed tax. The usual assessment is normally no more than three percent of the property's value. Any who fail to pay these taxes are evicted, and the property is put up for sale.

Licensing fees form the third type of civic revenue. Anyone wishing to start a business, open a shop or practice a trade or craft must pay a license fee to the city tax collectors. A license is good until the end of Calibration, and then, it must be renewed. The license costs a dinar for each month remaining until Calibration, plus five dinars for the Calibration days.

By Civility, all the First Age structures in Nexus are the property of the Council, and all residents of these buildings must pay rent. Estimates suggest that the Council's revenue from the rental of First Age buildings surpasses the revenues from all other sources combined. Each building is assessed a different total rent based on its square footage and location, and the building's residents themselves are charged with making an equitable division of the money between them. In practice, this means that the weaker, less capable tenants pay more, and the stronger tenants pay less. The Guild's annual payment for its 12-story building is a bar of jade, paid annually on the first day of Calibration directly to the Emissary. It is by far the largest such rental payment in the city, and one the Guild begrudges not at all.

The Civilities make payment of these minimal taxes the responsibility of the entity taxed. For example, a rickshaw driver is responsible for making his monthly tax payment at the appropriate District Assayer's office, rather than waiting for the officials to seek him out. If the Assayer must seek him out, it is entirely possible that the driver's neighbors will discover his corpse first, its skin carefully flensed from flesh and neatly folded beside him. The death penalty for tax evasion encourages others to pay their taxes on time and in full, especially when those taxes usually run about nine percent of one's income for the year.

The Councilors are not shy about where the money goes. Each district or operation of the city is expected to pay for its own operations out of pocket. For example, the libraries charge entry fees, and that money must pay for the building, the collection and repair of the books inside, the salaries of the employees and the property tax on the building. The city docks must also collect enough money from ships entering and leaving to keep the docks in repair and the pools dredged, to pay the stevedores' salaries and to pay their taxes. The property taxes and other money collected ends up in the city treasury, where two-thirds of the revenue is divided among the Councilors as their reward for a job well done. In essence, the city functions as a siphon for funneling money into the purses of its nine wealthiest citizens. They, in turn, rely on their own formidable powers and the Emissary to protect them from reprisal from disgruntled citizens.

Law and Lack of It

Nexus is not a city of laws, exactly, but this is not to say there is no law. The Dawn Sergeant regularly hires out mercenary companies to patrol the streets, particularly around the major marketplaces. The Emissary arbitrates disputes between artisans and merchants, usually to the dismay of both parties. The Midday Husband closes down the galleries of avant-garde artists who offend the sensibilities of the citizenry. All of these actions are rooted in the decrees of the Council, which themselves are rooted in the Dogma.

The Dogma

The Dogma is the closest thing Nexus has to a constitution. It consists of a set of six general orders issued in RY 52, and to violate them means death. The orders are fairly vague, and they allow the Council and the Emissary the widest latitude in their interpretation. The Emissary repeats the Dogma at least once a month, and almost every citizen of Nexus can recite it from memory.

The Dogma is:

No taxes shall be raised, save by the Council.
None shall obstruct trade.
None shall bring an army into Nexus.
No one shall commit wanton violence.
None may falsely claim the Council's name or sanction.
None shall harbor a fugitive from the Council's wrath.

The means of death assigned to violations of the Dogma are ghastly and horrifying to observers. Blood turns to quicksilver in the veins; mucus coagulates to steel in the lungs; bones mutate to hornets' nests; intestines turn to poisonous snakes in the belly. Muggers out for someone's purse will quickly apologize if their victim misinterprets an attack as a demand for tariffs or as being based on location and not mischance. Con artists prefer to represent themselves as Guild representatives, rather than suggest they are associated with the Harbor Master or the Clerk of Weights and

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Measures. Mothers turn in their only sons for shoplifting rather than risk harboring a fugitive who obstructed trade. Even mercenaries whose companies have barracks in the Cinnabar District make a point of peace-bonding their weapons at the city gates and going home in casual groups of five to eight. They travel through the city streets in formation only when working under contract for Nexus itself.

The Civilities

Draped over the Dogma are the individual decrees of the Councilors, called the Civilities. A great many Civilities are issued by a single Councilor, though some are issued by the whole Council. It is not at all uncommon for a Civility issued in the morning to be counteracted by a second or even a third Civility by noon or sundown.

The most ordinary Civilities are usually prosaic and common sense: "Dock workers shall not be impeded in their business." "No uninvited guests shall attend any wedding party." "Corpses shall not be flung into the canal system." The general tone of these Civilities can be summed up thus: "Mind your own business and don't complicate other people's lives unnecessarily." Dozens of such decrees may be issued in a week, but only flagrant violations are usually punished.

A second set of Nexus Civilities tends to drive most visitors mad, since they create rules and customs found nowhere else in Creation. Teahouses, restaurants and taverns always seat customers who arrive alone at a common table together after nightfall, since a law prohibits a single person to eat alone in darkness. Brothel customers interested in rough play must pay for it up front, to avoid being punished for breaking the Civility that states, "Striking a harlot is akin to breaking an artisan's wares without purchasing them." An unusual number of nursemaids hang around mercenary barracks, since many companies buy two-year-old boys as long-term investments in servants and trainees. No older children may be acquired in order not to break the Civility that requires that, "A child may not be sold after his third year of life."

Nexus natives seem to understand the ebb and flow of the Civilities instinctively and adjust to new decrees quite rapidly. Foreigners and visitors find it quite difficult to deal with, however, and many hire messengers or runners to remind them when they are about to break a decree.

The sum total of all extant Civilities, together with the Dogma, is contained in a massive book called the Incunabulum. Only two official copies exist. One is in the Council Offices in Nexus District, where a capable staff is on call to look up all Civilities and to interpret them. The other lies in the Council Tower, where Council members and their administrative staffs may consult it. The Incunabulum is under constant revision, with pages constantly being removed and added and individual decrees crossed out or edited.

Crime and Justice

Officially, the city of Nexus has only two punishments: death and exile. The Council's spies and informants deliver

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regular denunciations to the many letter-drops found near each of the District Assayers' offices and other official city buildings. Once a denunciation reaches the Midnight Queen, it is rare for more than 48 hours to pass before she executes sentence. Only in the case of conspiracies against the Council or the Guild does she stay her hand, waiting for more information to bring the whole plot to light. She frequently sends her favorite mercenary company, the Hooded Executioners, to handle the details of exiling minor offenders. Wealthier or more prestigious violators usually earn a visit from one of her hired assassins—or sometimes even a visit from the Emissary itself.

In rare instances, the Council will issue a direct sentence of exile or an official death warrant. Habitually, the Council prefers exile for those individuals or organizations that are already broken, for such persons are unlikely to seek revenge. They prefer to quickly kill more powerful entities, who might desire to avenge their dishonor at the Council's hands. From time to time, the Midday Husband will announce a general hunt for a miscreant of middling ability by the populace. If the individual escapes detection for two full days, he is rewarded with amnesty and a pouch of silver before being urged to seek his fortune somewhere other than Nexus.

It tends to be the victims of crime in Nexus who handle much of the city's petty thefts and muggings. A thief who steals bread might find himself pinned down by the baker's neighbors, and no law prevents the baker from beating him senseless, other than the Dogma prohibiting wanton violence. Neighborhood watches will hunt down a footpad who frequents their streets too often, and the watch will usually pay their costs by restraining her and making her available to her former victims, as a punching bag or worse.

The Civil Service

The Council of Entities pays the salaries of approximately 30,000 civil servants, who are divided into six ranks and 10 divisions. The divisions correspond to the six tax districts within Nexus, the city wall and out-wall territory, and the two ports; the two Council buildings form the final division. Each division's members wear a colored and knotted cord on their right shoulders to indicate their division, as well as a hat or turban to signal rank.

The first, highest rank holds only 30 ministers, who wear crimson turbans with blue silk tassels. These Master Assayers are assigned in groups of three to each Division, with one holding daylight responsibilities, another holding nighttime responsibilities and the Twilight Assayer covering for both at sunup, sundown and on festival days. They answer directly to the Council for any failures of profitability in their division.

The second rank wears red hats shaped rather like mushrooms or round loaves of bread. They are the city's accountants and senior clerks. They tend to the Incunabulum and keep the city's records. Below them, the junior clerks hold the third rank and wear round blue skullcaps. They issue licenses, make copies of decrees and write much of the Council's routine correspondence. The fourth rank of bureaucrats are the Assayers, who wear yellow skullcaps and actually visit each property in their districts in order to determine the property tax burden for the year.

The fifth and sixths rank of the civil service consist of the work crews who manage the pulley-car system, load and unload ships in the harbor and build and repair civic structures. The supervisors of the fifth rank wear rounded black hats with broad brims, while the ordinary laborers of the sixth rank wear blue hats of the same shape.

The Council also employs somewhere between 30,000 and 70,000 informants and spies, both paid and unpaid. Many are civil servants in their public lives, but many more are not. They tend to be invisible and unnoticeable until exactly the wrong time.

Economy

Profit makes the wheels turn in Nexus: on pulley cars, on wagons, on cargo cranes on the docks. From the Big Market to the Night Market, from the studios of Firewander to the foundries of Nighthammer to the dinner tables of Bastion, every being in Nexus is either looking for an angle and the next scheme… or is out to do something really devious. What follows is a brief glimpse into the top four money markets of Nexus.

Trade

The main business of Nexus is trade. Situated at the confluence of ocean and rivers, where caravans and cargo vessels meet, Nexus exists to put small shipments together with larger ones and to break up large shipments into smaller lots. Over 60 caravans a month enter the city from northern and southern destinations, while literally hundreds of ships come from west and east to trade. All come bearing a bounty of goods and raw materials: timber, ceramics, house kits, crystal, stone, metal work, raw ore, weapons, armor, firedust, ivory, bones, medicines, recreational drugs, oil, feathers, thread, cotton, silk, linen, wool, alpaca cloth, leather, flowers, seeds, paper, books, antiques, antiquities, junk, animals, plants, insects, machinery, gold, silver, prebuilt temples, clothes, orichalcum, jade, copper, bronze, iron, furs, dyes, potions, nostrums, furniture, beer, wine, liquors, spices, grains, vegetables, fruits, seafood, gems, jewelry, ships, boats, barges, beads, glass, seashells, First Age oddities and more. The whole essence of Nexus's markets is to put the right combination of goods in the right quantities on the right ship or in the right wagon train. Buy low, sell high is, as always, the rule of the game.

Wholesale

The biggest money is to be made in the wholesale business, with crates, barrels and amphorae of specific commodities sold in lots of 100 or more. Stevedores deliver goods

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from the docks or the gates to warehouses, which usually maintain visiting hours for prospective buyers. The seller presents samples at the Big Market, where 1,000 tents and pavilions play host to auctions with dozens, if not hundreds, of buyers.

The Nexus market is highly efficient. Coffeehouses and chocolate parlors around the Big Market have large chalkboards listing recent prices for goods. Loduba's specializes in raw materials, while Tokunoti's lists only shipments of cloth. Garaga's Coffee Emporium is the most general establishment, listing 1,100 spices and related commodities from abalone to yeast. Brokers interested in particular goods tend to eat and drink in these establishments between auctions, and the auctions usually take place just outside the front door. Trade in what you know is, as always, the rule of the game.

Retail

The Little Market offers smaller lots for sale for those not interested in filling several cargo holds or a dozen wagons. Small caravans rarely need to buy 100 sets of dishes, and even eastbound river barges cannot sell 500 barrels of beads. Hundreds of merchants in Nexus specialize in buying large cargoes in the Big Market and then selling those cargoes in smaller lots. The Little Market provides the outlet for these small lots, dealing in bolts and yards of cloth, instead of bales. Hundreds of tents fill the market square, with knife sharpeners cheek-by-jowl with spice merchants and rag dealers. Stores catering to more demanding clients fill the surrounding streets, canals and neighborhoods.

The Little Market is not exactly a bargain hunter's paradise. Sharp tongues and sharp trading are the norm here; the same families have haggled here for decades, and reputations and fortunes are on the line. Still, good quality can be found for fair prices, provided one can shut out the incessant noise of callers and bargaining going on. As a general rule, itinerant merchants occupy the stalls, while the shops belong to long-term Nexus residents, but quality—and garbage—can be found everywhere. Let the buyer beware is, as always, the rule of the game.

Bespoke

Of course, the wealthy prefer not to bargain for their clothes and furnishings and prefer one-of-a-kind pieces to items made for the general public. In the neighborhoods between the Little and Big Markets are the showrooms of bespoke artisans, who create lavish goods, clothes and decoration for the wealthy of Nexus and Creation as a whole. Often, the clothes are made elsewhere in the city, but the upscale showrooms are located in warrens of pedestrian streets too narrow for most carts. Dyertown produces fine clothes, while Redsmith produces custom weapons for duelists and fops alike. Sawdust Square specializes in wooden toys, boxes and furniture, while Little Cogging manufactures clocks and wind-up toys. Sand Alley and the Diamond are filled with goldsmiths, glass-wrights and jewelers, and Paper Lane is home to bookshops, scribes, ink-grinders, cartographer shops, instrument makers and papermakers.

The items that come from these showrooms command high prices, and the shops in each area band together in merchants' associations to pay for security at night. Of course, bespoke shops and ordinary retail stores often share walls in this part of town, owing to the proximity of the major marketplaces. Knowing which store to go to for the best supplies it as least as important as knowing what you want in the first place. Nine-tenths of everything is shit is, as always, the rule of the game.

Metalwork

Nexus has the largest forges and smelters in Creation—and some of the most technologically advanced. Most of the energy of these facilities is directed to iron production, for weapons and armor and tools, which are then shipped all over Creation (though most stay in the East). Nexus is also, however, home to three bell foundries working in bronze and hundreds of studios that make copper and tin cooking vessels. The docks of Nighthammer Pool concentrate exclusively on bringing ore and coal into the city to fuel these metalworking operations, and the city's main market for bulk ironwork is at the south end of the Nighthammer docks.

Spies from the Realm, Lookshy and elsewhere tend to keep a sharp eye on metal production in Nexus. A rise in armaments production tends to mean a rise in the number of mercenary companies or in the likely outbreak of a war somewhere else. The Arsenal neighborhood lies within Nighthammer, at the edge of Sentinel's Hill, and strangers are rarely welcome unless they come with a production order. Still, though the workers here tend to be tight-lipped, it is easy to count how many ore carts go in and how many wagons filled with spears go out.

Banking

Yinhang Square, northwest of the Little Market, is the center of commercial banking operations in Nexus. Forty-seven banks keep their vaults here, usually high in the First Age towers that shroud the square in constant shadow, even at midday. A side street leads from here to the Guild Tower, though most people approach by one of the nearby canals.

Banking in Nexus is a precarious affair. Banking relies upon trust to function, and many foreigners have a difficult time trusting their money to banks in a nation with no laws. On the other hand, several Civilities of long standing protect both bankers and clients, and at least five locally headquartered banks have been in business for more than 100 years. For those still nervous about depositing their cash, 15 of the banks are actually headquartered outside Nexus, in places such as Great Forks and Melevhil—so that if the laws in Nexus change suddenly, the money in

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the bank doesn't necessarily vanish, although withdrawals become a major issue at times.

Exchange

Most banks hold relatively few deposits in Nexus, anyway. Their main function is to govern exchange rates and issue banknotes based on their reserves. People bring money to Nexus from all over Creation and expect to trade for goods made everywhere. There needs to be some commonality in how different traders view different currencies—one shopkeeper cannot accept cowries while another refuses them; likewise, no one is prepared to exist solely on a silver standard such as the Guild uses or the hardly impartial jade scrip of the Realm.

Therefore, the banks serve Nexus as a clearinghouse for different currencies. Merchants can deposit cowries, silver, jade or jade scrip with a bank, and the bank then provides banknotes so the merchant can pay for goods and services without lugging bags of silver around. Those who receive banknotes can either go directly to the issuing bank or turn a banknote over to their own bank and redeem it for the currency of their choice. Once a week, with Yinhang Square under tight security, all the banks trade banknotes with each other, returning notes to their issuers for prompt payment in silver, jade, jade scrip or cowries—whatever they feel they will need in the near future. In this way, the individual banks maintain their cash reserves, and the banks keep each other honest about their holdings.

Insurance

The Guild tightly controls most of the insurance business in Nexus, as it does throughout the River Province. Gongfangs in Nexus compile monthly risk tables on various types of cargo and precious materials and sell insurance on that basis all over the East, and insurance agents travel with many of the larger caravans so that prompt payment on claims can be made. Nexus itself is the center of the Guild's insurance business, with offices on Gongfang Row near Yinhang Square, on the Nighthammer Docks and on the Outer Nexus Docks.

Loans and Escrow

Many banks do make loans, but usually only for genuinely profitable endeavors. Nexus uses a salt rate averaged between those set by the spirits of the drying pools in Calin, the salt deposits in Marukan and the drying pools at Marita. This tends to make loans cheaper and more stable, while retaining their security and profitability for the banks themselves.

Another function of the banks is to serve as an escrow service for merchants who do not particularly trust one another. A buyer may transfer money and a fee to a bank to pay for a set of goods he does not think the seller will deliver. The bank confirms to the seller that it holds the money and gives the seller 10 days, usually, to hand over the purchased goods. If the handover is delayed, the bank refunds the money to the seller.

Credit

Banks will occasionally extend credit to particularly powerful, market-savvy and stationary individuals and organizations. The Guild's hierarchs, the Councilors and senior factors of important mercantile organizations in Nexus all have the connections, social clout and economic muscle to get banks to fork over cash with little to no collateral. Most traveling merchant princes lack those connections, and as a matter of policy, banks do not lend to Exalts or Anathema at all, since their futures and economic security tend to be shaky at best.

Labor

The fourth major economic powerhouse in Nexus is the labor market. All Creation runs on animal muscle power, human muscle power or Essence—and Essence relies upon the hiring of mortal thaumaturges or the Exalted, rare commodities indeed. As a result, the markets for muscle power—whether the Brood Market for livestock, the Coffleblock Market for slaves, Livery Square for mercenaries or the Great Forks Bazaar for hired labor—are crowded to bursting every day.

The old covered bazaar near the Great Forks Gate is probably the most unusual trading area in Nexus. Here, people offer themselves—or more specifically their skills—for sale. Trained military engineers from the Realm, sorcerers and alleged sorcerers, musicians, architects, master builders, military officers and bodyguards can all offer their abilities to a buying public. Some offer their skills for sale solo. Others, such as the Munificent Road-Builders Crew of Bastion, work in crews with their fellows (though true mercenary companies usually hire out of Yuruga's Hall in Livery Square). The buyers can be as exotic as the sellers: Gods come by, looking for colleges of priests or architects for their sanctums, and Lookshy regularly buys up military engineers defecting from the Realm.

Mercenary Hire

For kingdoms and city-states looking to fight a few battles, one needs to go to Yuruga's Hall, a stately brick structure overlooking Livery Square. Representatives of all of the mercenary companies lodged in Cinnabar District have their booths here, with elaborate displays showing their soldiers in action, trophies and medals received from previous engagements and usually some of the toughest troops in the unit manning the booths. Livery Square turns into a parade ground a few times every week, as prospective employers put down enough of a deposit that they can see the goods offered.

Because the Dogma forbids anyone from bringing an army into Nexus, the mercenary companies do their best to keep a low profile. Every company is also required to post a

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substantial bond with the Council, equal to a mina of jade for every talon of troops garrisoned within the walls. If a talon then riots, causes disruption or threatens to act against the safety of the city or the Council, the mina is forfeit, and every officer and sergeant in that talon dies. Messily.

In fact, the single most important body of contractors for mercenaries is the city of Nexus itself, the various neighborhoods, districts, merchants associations and operations areas such as the docks and city walls. Nearly everyone wants police service some of the time, as well as bodyguards, riot-control forces and warehouse guards. Companies presently stationed in the city derive much bread-and-butter income from these sorts of duties, though fighting in a genuine battle tends to bring them substantially more money in a single shot.

Slavery

Slavery occupies a strange middle ground in Nexus. On one hand, slavery is illegal in the city itself, though in the fields between the city walls and the outer borders, it is somewhat nebulously governed. Just because slavery is illegal, however, a slave entering Nexus is not automatically set free. A thousand or more slaves pass through the Coffleblock Market every day, giving lie to claims that Nexus is a free city. Legal theorists argue that only enslavement itself is illegal in Nexus, but that since a slave had no rights before coming to the city, the Civilities grant a slave no rights between arriving and departing.

In truth, the slave market concession in Nexus brings in thousands of silver talents in revenue to the Council every year. Prohibiting the slave trade would cause revenues to drop, cause some merchants to seek out other ports, force the Guild out and possibly lead to the emergence of an economic and political rival to Nexus among the River Province states. An anti-slavery campaign would also create powerful enemies. Despite these dangers, there is a growing grassroots effort, collectively called the "Liberating Ones," who lobby the Council and the civil service to pass anti-slavery Civilities.

Organizations

Humans crave organization and guidelines for living. Hence, many people in Nexus belong to any number of groups: neighborhood associations, temple societies, support groups, funeral clubs, sports teams, choral singing alliances, amateur theatrical societies, bands and more. Notice boards in many neighborhoods announce meeting and performance times for many of these organizations, all over the city.

Some groups are sufficiently powerful to require care on the part of visitors. The Artisans Leagues work to keep prices high for locally made goods. They even have some political clout since they can afford to pay frequent bribes to the Councilors. The District Associations also command a great deal of respect, and their leaderships sometimes act as unofficial polling groups for the Councilors. No one overlooks either the Guild or the mercenary companies based in Nexus, however.

The Guild

The Guild is the single largest mercantile organization in Creation. Operating a far-flung network of overland caravans and merchant ships, the Guild began to bring traveling merchants, artisans, slavers, shopkeepers and local commercial establishments together about 600 years ago. It has since grown into a vertically and horizontally integrated monopoly in many parts of the world, acting as the exclusive supplier for more than 1,000 inland towns and states in the East and dozens of cities in both the South and the North. By choosing what to trade and when, the Guild has founded kingdoms and started wars, as well as crippled states and ended conflict, all in the name of business and a profit. Even in Nexus, where restricting trade is a capital offense, the Guild controls roughly half of the city's commerce.

The Guild's headquarters is in a 12-story First Age tower near the center of the Nexus District. The lower three floors are a high-quality combination of department store and brothel where everything and everyone is for sale. Beautiful men and women model the latest fashions and hawk the latest high-quality goods. The upper nine floors hold the central offices of the Guild's banking, insurance and caravan operations, as well as apartments for its senior leadership, the Directorate.

Mercenary Companies

While not major players in the politics of the city, the 15 mercenary companies based in barracks at the northern end of the Cinnabar District are significant contributors to the city's economy. The Council regularly hires mercenary units to patrol the fashionable parts of town, the city's parks and major streets and, occasionally, to fight its wars. In addition, much of the money the companies raise in fighting abroad winds up getting spent in Nexus once they return home.

Every company has a different procedure for admitting new members. Some units have probationary periods up to a year in length. Others, such as the Bronze Pioneers, require prospective employees to fight a randomly chosen company member to the death.

Each company maintains a barracks area in Nexus to which outsiders are rarely admitted. These walled compounds usually contain multistory halls suitable for several hundred soldiers each, private and semi-private quarters for senior and junior officers, a mess hall, a training salle, a small parade ground and an infirmary for soldiers likely to recover from injuries. A small neighborhood of brothels, taverns, teahouses, armorers and other businesses catering to soldiers usually cluster around each compound. Mercenaries tend to stick close to these neighborhoods, as entering the neighborhood of another company is a friendly invitation to brawl.

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The companies maintain a level of courteous, professional rivalry within Nexus, but friendships between ordinary soldiers are discouraged. The soldiers might find themselves on opposite sides of a battlefield someday, and it is best not to get too attached. Fraternization between officers is encouraged to some degree, however, and the Nexus Military College operates year-round as neutral ground for officers to build their knowledge and reputation.

The Hooded Executioners

Description: The Executioners have largely become the police force of Nexus by holding down the most Council contracts for police work for 38 years running. Their commander, an outcaste and former Imperial Army officer, assembled the company 85 years ago. The Hooded Executioners operate mostly in fang- and scale-sized units, occasionally putting together a full talon.
Commanding Officer: Dragonlord Johoda
Armor Color: Blue, with leather hoods with crimson crests
Motto: "Yield or die."
General Makeup: 400 fangs of light infantry; 60 mixed scales of a fang each of light and medium infantry, slingers, archers and medium cavalry.
Overall Quality: Fair. Scales tend to be of higher quality.
Magnitude: 1–3
Drill: 3
Close Combat Attack: 3 **Close Combat Damage:** 3
Ranged Attack: 3 **Ranged Attack Damage:** 3
Endurance: 6 **Might:** 0 **Armor:** 1 (-2 mobility penalty) **Morale:** 3
Formation: Four hundred fangs at the main barracks in Cinnabar; 10 scales at secondary barracks in each district of the city. The Executioners hire out fangs, scales and, infrequently, talons.

The Bronze Pioneers

Description: The Bronze Pioneers are a heavy infantry unit specializing in urban combat. The Council calls upon them when necessary to quash rebellions and riots in the city. More frequently, however, they serve outside the city walls, in the Hundred Kingdoms and in the South. Actively disliked by most Nexus residents, the Pioneers return the favor by keeping to themselves, and hunting the leaders of any riots or those on whom the Council imposes the death penalty. The Pioneers lease troops in fangs, scales, talons and wings.
Commanding Officer: Jurgen Icefist
Armor Color: Bronze lamellar
Motto: "First to battle!"
General Makeup: Four dragons of heavy infantry, three of light infantry, two talons of archers, two wings of cavalry.
Overall Quality: Excellent

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Magnitude: 1–4
Drill: 4
Close Combat Attack: 4 **Close Combat Damage:** 3
Ranged Attack: 2 **Ranged Damage:** 2
Endurance: 8 **Might:** 0 **Armor:** 2
Morale: 4
Formation: Its infantry dragons are based in the main barracks; cavalry wings are stationed beyond the walls of Nexus.

The Nightarrows

Description: The Nightarrows are well-liked in Nexus, although they hold the Council contract on carrying out the death penalty. They provide the force for guarding the city's parks, which endears them to many despite their dark reputation. The Nightarrows lease men in talons or in wings.
Commanding Officer: Dageru Yohotima
Armor Color: Black lamellar
Motto: None
General Makeup: Four dragons of medium infantry, two dragons of slingers and javeliners, one dragon of archers, one dragon of mounted archers.
Overall Quality: Fair
Magnitude: 3–4
Drill: 2
Close Combat Attack: 2 **Close Combat Damage:** 3
Ranged Attack: 3 **Ranged Damage:** 3
Endurance: 5 **Might:** 0 **Armor:** 2 (-2 mobility penalty) **Morale:** 4
Formation: Five of the Nightarrows dragons are usually on extended contract away from Nexus at any given time; usually one wing of archers is based in Nexus to meet the Council contract.

The Nighthammer Iron League

Description: The Iron League began as a neighborhood watch in Nighthammer and now hires itself out as a neighborhood security force within Nexus. Armed with cudgels, knives, staffs and spears at best, the League's members are seen as "mercenaries of the people," and their rates justify it. A fang of the Iron League costs Resources 1 for a week's service, compared with Resources 2 for most of the others. What they lack in threatening demeanor, they make up for by being fierce and numerous: The Iron League has the equivalent of a legion and a half of active-duty soldiers.
Commanding Officer: Kemetu of Nighthammer
Armor Color: Varied
Motto: Get them!
General Makeup: Light infantry.
Overall Quality: Fair
Magnitude: 1–5
Drill: 1
Close Combat Attack: 2 **Close Combat Damage:** 2
Endurance: 3 **Might:** 0 **Armor:** 1 (-1 mobility penalty) **Morale:** 2
Formation: The Iron League maintains offices in each district, but has no main barracks; it has a parade and training ground on the south side of Nighthammer District. New members of the company serve as probationers for a full year.

The Iron Brotherhood

Description: Master Fedekiro is a renegade Immaculate monk and a Dragon-Blood of the Earth Aspect. His Iron Brotherhood first appeared during the Wyld War, and it has since fought all over the Hundred Kingdoms. Although his mercenary company has only 300 soldiers, Fedekiro's discipline and training makes the Brotherhood one of the most feared military units for its size in the East. Operating in fangs within Nexus, the Brotherhood keeps order in high-prestige neighborhoods such as Brindel and East Parko.
Commanding Officer: Master Fedekiro
Armor Color: Maroon with blue laces.
Motto: "Fight!"
General Makeup: One scale archers, two scales light infantry, three scales medium infantry, two scales heavy infantry, one scale medium cavalry, one scale martial artists, one scale siege engineers, one scale light cavalry.
Overall Quality: Elite
Magnitude: 1-2
Drill: 5
Close Combat Attack: 4 **Close Combat Damage:** 3
Ranged Attack Rating: 3 **Ranged Damage:** 3
Endurance: 9 **Might:** 0 **Armor:** 3
Morale: 4
Formation: The barracks complex at the north end of Livery Street houses the entire company, and it has a private dock; the Brotherhood is the only mercenary company in the city that can leave without using the main city docks or the gates. It costs Resources 3 to hire them.

Districts of Nexus

The Council has divided the city into six districts for the purposes of tax collection. Streets and canals further divide these districts into neighborhoods and wards, each of which has its own character and sense of itself. Most people spend a great deal of time in their home district. Few travel abroad without a weapon and friends by day or night.

Nexus

Nexus District is the one exception to this rule. Its borders touch on Nighthammer, Cinnabar and Sentinel's Hill, and it is so much the center of the city's commerce and business that the main thoroughfares connecting it with other districts are patrolled around the clock. Numerous canals both divide and unite the district into 20 small islands, every one crowded with both First Age towers and modern edifices three and four stories high. This used to

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be the city of Hollow's commercial district, so it continues to be in present-day Nexus. The Big Market, the center of Nexus's wholesale market, faces east onto the Grand Canal, and all three pulley-car lines stop here before diverging.

To the northeast lies the Brood Market, for animal sales. Directly north is Imperium, where most Realm merchants have their warehouses. To the west are all the specialty neighborhoods of the Diamond, Redsmith, Sand Alley, Paper Lane, Yinhang Square (where the Guild's headquarters rises over the city), Dyer Square and Gongfang Row. Amid all those specialty neighborhoods is the Little Market, center of the city's retail trade, with Sawdust Square and Little Cogging to the south, joining up with the Coffleblock Market and the slave pens. East of the Diamond is the Council Building, where the Emissary makes his pronouncements. A heliograph on its roof transmits messages up to the Council Tower on Sentinel's Hill. Southwest of there, on Fishmarket Street, is the Harlotry, the city's high-priced red-light district. Nexus Pool forms the northern boundary of the whole district. There, the inner and outer dock complexes bustle with ships unloading cargo to lighters and couriers who transport it down the city's canals. At the eastern edge of Nexus, just south of the insurance agents of Gongfang Row, is the dubious pleasure of the Night Market, where all goods are sold that the Council says may not be sold by daylight.

Nighthammer

Curving around Nexus District on the west side, and cupping it like a left hand, is Nighthammer District. So called because of the constant pounding of metal and the roar from the foundries and smelters of the ironworks, Nighthammer is a series of working class wards and neighborhoods, filled with bustle, energy and "Nexus snow"—a combination of ash from the furnaces and gangue from the burning ore. At the easternmost end of the district is the Arsenal, where the city's main weapons manufactories are located. Close by is the Iron League's parade ground. Where Fishmarket Street ends is the Ironmarket and the Fishmarket, practically right on top of the Nighthammer docks.

Nighthammer Pool is larger than Nexus Pool, but shallower. Most of the ships here carry ore in or finished ironwork out, and the pool must be dredged regularly to keep it from filling up with tailings. At the north end of the docks is the tenement ghetto of Nightside, where the rent is inversely proportional to the frequency of floods and proximity to the smelters and forges. The so-called University of Nexus began here 20 years ago, and scholars and students with little money meet here to trade knowledge and speculation.

The district then bends east and north again, winding through canals and the highly dangerous stretch of Riverlaine and River Park, the least-patrolled park in the

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city and the most frequently flooded. Nighthammer ends in the relatively quiet neighborhoods of Sijantown, where the city's dead are hastily embalmed before the voyage to Sijan, and Lookshy-town, where the Seventh Legion stations its embassy and purchasing agents.

Cinnabar

Cinnabar is the city's cultural district in many ways. Though Livery Square and many of the mercenary barracks are located here along the river, a number of Nexus's schools, monasteries, libraries and upscale retail shopping areas are situated there, as well. There are numerous residential areas, as well, which tend to be elegant row houses and small-scale estates modeled on those in Bastion. Cinnabar proudly counts art galleries, public ballrooms, theaters, small stadiums and parks among its many cultural offerings. The district is well patrolled by mercenaries who remind scruffier visitors to mind their manners.

At the south end of the district, near where it joins Sentinel's Hill, is the 200-acre Parko Llana, the city's largest park. A long rectangle running east to west, it is divided into formal gardens, concert lawns, a botanical garden and athletic fields. The Bastion pulley-car line runs along the north side of the park, and the houses in the immediate vicinity are highly prized dwellings. Even here, however, neighborhoods have distinct characters: West Parko is very much a neighborhood of artisans, poets, sculptors, fashion designers and fresco painters, while East Parko is more a quarter for the moderately wealthy and the mistresses of the very wealthy.

Three of the more famous establishments of Cinnabar are the main branch of the city library, at the southeast corner of the Parko Llana; the Players' Menagerie, a theater and acting school on a main street in West Parko; and the Plaza of Rebirth. The city library is the only thing in Nexus that is free to citizens (although proving one's citizenship to a Nexus librarian can be a tricky thing), and many scrolls, tomes and codices are available there. The city archives are closed to anyone who does not have a permit from one of the Master Assayers, however. The Players' Menagerie performs a wide variety of classical and modern plays, operettas and musicals, tending more to the ribald and the risqué over the dignified. The Plaza of Rebirth is actually the city's largest public assembly hall. The private rooms there serve as reception spaces for elegant weddings and coming of age parties, while the main hall performs many functions: It has seen large public parties, dances and musical performances. It has even functioned as a dueling ground, a gladiatorial arena and as a venue for athletic competition.

Bastion

Located on the heights between Cinnabar and the city wall, Bastion is the most affluent neighborhood in the city, filled with the estates of the supremely wealthy and powerful. Well-heeled merchant princes, the hierarchs of the Guild and the Council of Entities all have large estates here. Bastion's broad streets are paved with well-shaped cobblestones and are occasionally spangled with gold dust and flowers at festival times. Many of the houses here are First Age wonders, with elegant walkways, fountains, solariums and gardens. Most have more servants than residents, and the prohibitions against slavery in the rest of the city are to some degree in abeyance here.

Undesirables are stopped in this neighborhood by units of the Bronze Pioneers or the Hooded Executioners, who patrol the district with almost fanatical vigilance. On one memorable occasion, a near riot broke out when the Pioneers stopped a shady gang apparently casing houses, and the "gang" turned out to be the Iron Brotherhood's men, hired to guard the estate of a new resident.

Few of Bastion's neighborhoods have names. Rather, the individual streets serve as a pecking order for the residents, with Dawn Lane being a more prestigious address than Lilac Street for instance. The one exception is Brindel Way. The dead-end street has more than 100 houses, all very elegant and well proportioned. No one seems to know who lives there, however. The district has a number of shops of very famous repute on Bastion Road and Great Forks Gate Road, though the old bazaar just inside the gate has been converted into a specialty labor market. Many of the Hundred Kingdoms and Confederation states maintain embassies in this area, usually in a house prominently displaying the nation's flag. The wealth of a kingdom can often be assessed from the size of its ambassador's dwelling.

If the University of Nexus is home to the city's least-well-off students and teachers, the School of Philosophy is home to the wealthiest students and some of the brightest lights in the scholarly establishment of Nexus. Its four buildings are located on Wall Street, with a landscaped campus going down to the Solstice Canal.

Sentinel's Hill

Lying between Nexus, Nighthammer, Firewander, Cinnabar and Bastion, the Sentinel's Hill District could lay claim to being the center of the city. Atop the heights of the hill where Switchback Street joins Wander Street stands the Council Tower where the Council of Entities meets. A short distance away stands the Tomb of Candle-Eyed Skulls, and the Shrine of the Immaculate Order is only a short walk downhill from there. Were it not for the massive but makeshift Sentinel's Wall dividing the district from Firewander, it might almost be thought a safe place to live.

In fact, Sentinel's Hill used to be a cleared buffer zone between the Wyld-overwhelmed Firewander and the rest of the city. As time passed, the Council allowed more of Sentinel's Hill to be occupied until it is now completely crowded with tenements, apartment buildings and townhouses. Many of the streets are too narrow to pass except on foot. The only exceptions are the horrifically steep Switchback Street and

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the remains of the Shogunate's Great Eastern Road (now renamed Carter Street), which runs along the shores of the Gray River and frequently floods. Mercenaries still staff the district's towers, but as the Wyld activity in Firewander has decreased, this guard has been increasingly relaxed. The southern base of Sentinel's Hill is home to several ethnic neighborhoods: Forkstown, Calintown and Maruktown all cluster there along Carter Street.

There are few First Age buildings here. Most are wood, lath and plaster. Fires regularly sweep through. Shops and tearooms fill lower floors. Laundry hangs over main streets, even five stories above the roads. It is a popular place to live, since rents are cheap, and it is comfortable dwelling for both middle class artisans and successful businessmen who dislike the staid comforts of Bastion.

Firewander

Firewander was the true center of Hollow until the Great Contagion, when Fair Folk targeted the district and rendered it uninhabitable. Now, the golden dome of the provincial capitol is rarely visible, due to the constant flame, smoke and lightning. Scholars believe the Fair Folk set off some sort of weapon under the dome, creating the Wyld zone that still persists.

Many residents live in huts and hovels around the edge of the Wyld zone, and the neighborhoods of Filth, Tellnaught and Brookside remain strong despite the rising number of mutations in their midst. Residents of Firewander tend to be among the poorest and most pitiful in Nexus, yet the Council sends tax collectors to them anyway. A few shady commercial areas exist in Firewander, and some adventurous merchants even risk eating in Firewander restaurants.

The Six Tombs of Nexus

Many Anathema lived in Hollow at the time of their overthrow, and six died within the city boundaries. The Dragon-Blooded built tombs for them where they fell, partly to placate their spirits and partly to prevent others from rousing them. The Council of Entities decreed that attempting to open or loot the tombs shall be punished by death or exile, but the tombs seem to have their own methods for defending themselves against unlawful intrusion. Each tomb is about a block square. Three are aboveground, and three are below.

The Tomb of Candle-Eyed Skulls stands on the flanks of Sentinel's Hill. A broad plaza ringed by an iron fence surrounds a three-story structure built entirely of human skulls. At night, the skulls' eye sockets become lit from within by what looks to be candle flames. Anyone living who enters the plaza within the fence during the day dies suddenly, their bodies turning to dust after a minute, while unliving beings simply crumble to dust. At night, fire shoots from the eyes of the skulls to consume all intruders.

The Tomb of Red-Hot Iron, in Nighthammer, is now sheathed almost entirely in firebrick and forms the foundation and heating coil for an iron smelter above it. Tools

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and weapons touching it, even those of First Age materials, melt to slag instantly, while flesh or other combustible materials carbonize.

The Tomb of Keening Spirits in Firewander is a plain, ugly vault of gray stone with no visible entrances. Twenty chanting specters ring the tomb, pausing only to attack trespassers who approach within 20 feet—pulverizing them with spectral fists and sucking out their Essence. Over 100 ghosts used to patrol the tomb and wake the district with their noise, but many have faded away over time.

The Tomb of Singing Blades in Bastion is a faceted dome ten yards high, apparently constructed of diamond, fitted with an orichalcum door facing west and a matching orichalcum roof spike. This spike draws numerous lightning strikes and might be part of the defenses of the tomb. The tomb's main defense consists of thousands of whirling daggers that orbit the tomb at a distance of 10 yards, screaming through the air like a madwoman's ululation. These blades instantly target anyone who approaches the tomb, and cut her, her armor, her weapons—and on one occasion, even her warstrider—to pieces in moments.

The Tomb of Ice beneath Nexus District is an elaborate structure of translucent blue ice based on hexagons that appears similar in design to a honeycomb. Tunnels near the tomb have a distinct chill, and anything that actually comes into contact with the tomb freezes instantly. Tools wielded against the tomb shatter with a single blow, and people and animals that touch it become flash-frozen.

The Tomb of Night, located only 500 yards from the Tomb of Ice, is a 100-yard-radius sphere of darkness that no light can pierce and that emits no sound. Those who touch it feel a pleasant coolness, and some have even put their arms inside without apparent ill effects. Once someone enters the darkness fully, however, he never returns. Attempts to hold hands or rope explorers together have all failed. The ropes can be pulled free with knots untied and adventurers vanished, even if they enter for no longer than a blink.

Nexus, a Magnitude 5 Dominion
Military: 1 **Government:** 3 **Culture:** 4
Abilities: Awareness 3, Bureaucracy 3, Craft 4 (Universities +1), Integrity 2 (Secret Police +3), Investigation 3, Occult 5 (Savant Academy +2, Supernatural Etiquette +1), Performance 1, Presence 3 (Imperious Demands +2, Organized Crime +1), Stealth 3, War 1 (Defense +3)
Virtues: Compassion 2, Conviction 4, Temperance 3, Valor 3
Virtue Flaw: Conviction **Current Limit:** 7
Willpower: 7
Bonus Points: 25 **External Bonus Points:** 15
Notes: The number of potential savants and sorcerers in Nexus is uncountable, considering its absurdly high level of supernatural activity. At the very least, every member of the Council of Entities may be considered a sorcerer with Legitimacy, and they almost certainly have at least a few powerful dominion-affecting Charms among them. Its external bonus points, gained from the dozens of treaties it has signed and the military protection it claims from the Confederation of Rivers, are invested in one dot of War, the War specialty, the Occult (Supernatural Etiquette) specialty and the last dot of Valor. The rest of its bonus points are the other specialties and the last dots of Occult, Craft and Stealth.
The City of a Million Lice is renowned all over the world for its savage, cutthroat economics and the "survival of the fittest" philosophy of most of its inhabitants. Its population is rarely swayed by such considerations as honor, glory, mercy or, for that matter, ethics. In Limit Break, nothing will matter to them but profit and survival.

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NOT FAR NOW, STORM!
GIVE IT UP, ANATHEMA!
YOU'RE TRAPPED! YOU'LL NEVER REACH YOUR SEVENTH LEGION ALLIES NOW!
IT'S ALL RIGHT, STORM. KEEP RUNNING AND HAVE FAITH.
SORRY, VERIS, BUT THESE ORDERS MUST GET THROUGH!

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CHAPTER THREE
WARLORDS OF THE SCAVENGER LANDS

Lookshy

Lookshy is the most powerful state in the Scavenger Lands and the nerve center of the Confederation of Rivers' military power. Coming from a rigorous military society primarily descended from the Seventh Legion, Lookshy's armies are the most loyal, disciplined and capable forces in the region. In addition to raw might and impressive numbers, Lookshy also possesses more potent First Age weaponry than any armed force in Creation.

History of the Seventh Legion

The Seventh Legion was originally called the Seventh Legion of the Dragon-Blooded Shogunate (Reinforced) and was the Shogunate's primary security force south of the Yanaze and east of Great Forks. This force became fragmented during the Contagion as desperate battles raged against the Fair Folk. Some talons wandered for months without news. Many puzzled and weary taizei led their charges in circles, while others frenziedly laid waste to all in their path, seeking an end to the raksha, with no heed to the lives and nations destroyed in the process.

Chumyo Nefvarin Gilshalos reunited much of the Seventh Legion at Deheleshen. The legionnaires found the great city razed and blighted by the raksha, with few survivors huddled in the ruins. Though the greatest of the Deheleshen structures, the Teocalla of Tu Yu, the Deheleshen Lighthouse and the Palace of the Maximum Fallahshu still stood, the city appeared as if it had been abandoned for 1,000 years. Once-great walls now crumbled at a touch, and ancient, fortified towers lay toppled in the streets.

Soon after, the Seventh Legion met the raksha force known as the Villanua Potenci in battle at Deheleshen. Led by the raksha general No-Lion, the Villanua Potenci was an infamous brigade of Fair folk soldiers who burned villages, slaughtered peasants and fathered half-fae children along the Yanaze.

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Though weary, the Seventh Legion drove the Villanua Potenci into retreat. Nefvarin and 30,000 men pursued the enemy for many skirmish-filled days until the raksha were finally thrown back by the Realm's defenses.

The Seventh Legion had nowhere to go once the conflict ended. Homes throughout the East had been ravaged, families slaughtered and the Shogunate crushed. Most who had not been killed by the invaders years before succumbed to the last vestiges of the Contagion. Some took their own lives in despair. Scarred survivors who could not understand a world without constant violence and grief went off in search of new enemies. Those who were weary of strife remained, intending to build a better world out of the ruins.

Twenty years later, the new city of Lookshy stood among the remains of Deheleshen. Even in those early days, Lookshy was already an important outpost for military action and for trade. Ideally located as it was on the coast of the Inland Sea, it stood at the head of most of the region's trade routes. In another dozen years, the Seventh Legion dominated the countryside, providing safety for traders, travelers and settlers. As word spread, thousands journeyed to Lookshy to enjoy protection from a world now unfamiliar and dangerous.

Would-Be Conquerors

As chumyo, Nefvarin commanded the rebuilding effort. Many of Deheleshen's survivors, eager to see their city great again, welcomed Nefvarin and the Seventh Legion.

But there are always those who believe they are wiser or stronger and therefore more fit to rule. Dozens of local warlords claimed sovereignty over the promontory in the years that followed. Most were easily defeated or otherwise persuaded to end their suits. Others proved more obstinate. Very few are remembered by history.

Perhaps in reaction to the emergence of the Scarlet Empress on the Blessed Isle, one obscure shozei, Fallaha Gherin, conspired to have Nefvarin assassinated and himself named Shogun. This brief episode lasted only nine days and would have been unworthy of note if Fallaha had not claimed true descent from the Shogun and had evidence to support his claim. While historians now argue several minor points concerning the lineage of the Shogunate, none can say for certain whether Fallaha's documents were authentic, as they were lost in the swirl of arrests and executions. Fallaha's family, who publicly denounced him as a liar, relocated to a neighboring community and obscurity as the incident was largely forgotten.

The Realm Enters the Scavenger Lands

Soon after the wars with the Fair Folk, engaging but unreliable tales spread to Lookshy of a powerful Empress who activated the Old Realm defenses and repelled the raksha threat, a ruler now solidifying her rule on the Blessed Island. Some claimed she was either a god or a demon. Others touted her beauty and might. While it was clear to Lookshy folk that *someone* had ended the invasion, few cared to speculate further. While travelers might arrive with news of the heroes found on the Blessed Isle and their magnificent ruler, Lookshy now had its own heroes and legends. The deeds of foreigners were of little interest.

In time, the Scarlet Empress addressed Nefvarin with an official writ, in which she claimed sovereignty over the legions of the old Shogunate and demanded that the Seventh Legion fall into line with the rest. Nefvarin refused to support her claim, citing doubts about the legitimacy of her rule. These communiqués were civil in tone, but firm, while the Empress's letters used vague insinuations, but no particular threat.

In Realm Year 45, dozens of emissaries from the Scarlet Empress arrived in Lookshy, demanding oaths of fealty to the Empress. Nefvarin and his officers did not flatter them or hide their contempt for the "soft worms in serpents' dress," as he wrote of the ambassadors in his reply to the Empress. Over the next few years, Nefvarin received a number of progressively imperious communications from the Blessed Isle. Nefvarin replied to none of them.

As other city-states and civilizations gave their allegiance to the Scarlet Empress, Lookshy developed a reputation for being a place of haughty folk who thought themselves better than their neighbors. During that time, a famous epic, *The Garrulous Citizen*, was published in Nexus, about an obnoxious leader who constantly invoked the superiority of his homeland and its people. This extended allegory gained popularity with the help of the Realm's propaganda ministers, who relished the opportunity to turn Lookshy's neighbors against them. Another work, a political pamphlet called, *The Twilight of the East*, spoke of the Scavenger Lands as poor and ruined, blaming such conditions on Lookshy's refusal to bow to the Scarlet Empress, whom the work labeled "the most worthy and gentle potentate in all the ages of man." These works fomented anti-Lookshyan sentiment throughout the region and are still read to this day.

Construction and Discoveries in a City of Wonders

The prevailing attitude of Lookshy's citizens was that they would rather die than give up to the Empress what they had worked so hard to achieve—for now Lookshy was truly a wonder. In less than half a century, Lookshy was transformed from ruination to marvel. While smaller than the modern-day city, Lookshy was already the greatest city in the Scavenger Lands, boasting a hearthstone-powered First Age light rail system, unrivaled roads, three prestigious military academies and, most significantly, a satisfied and active citizenry.

The Palace of the Maximum Fallahshu was renovated in RY 48. The Lookshy Manse was the result, a massive fortress in the heart of Lookshy that met with fanfare from Lookshy's citizens and shocked amazement from foreigners. It is even said that Tien Yu herself took notice of the sublime design and personally rewarded the sorcerer-engineer responsible on

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the stairs of the manse. Accounts of this reward vary from a passionate kiss to torrid oral sex on the manse stair (though in the present conservative era, legend favors the former).

The next great public work, a very faithful reconstruction of the Teocalla of Tu Yu, was accomplished in RY 55. The grand pyramidal structure used many of the original 30-ton granite blocks and furnishings left intact following Deheleshen's fall. The new temple retained the original shape but included a domed chamber at the pyramid's apex to be used as a ceremonial center and celestial meeting chamber. Tu Yu approved of this function and returned to the city those superintendents that had been removed during the Contagion.

In RY 62, the Lower City fortress known as the Port Citadel was completed. The building's design rivaled the Lookshy Manse in function, if not in beauty. Upon its completion, the citizens of Lookshy boasted that Lookshy was nigh on impregnable from land or sea.

Internal Struggle

Certain factions in the city thought Lookshy should align with the Empress. While most had little influence, a few posed significant problems for the fledgling state.

Puso Varkei, a popular statesman during the first century, used rhetoric, accusations and lies to convince thousands of Lookshy's destitute to fight for the Empress during the first Realm invasion. Unfortunately for Puso, the uprising quickly became an unruly mob more interested in pillaging than noble goals. When the mob was contained, Puso was whipped and demoted for his unpatriotic intentions. He spent the remainder of his life in disgrace.

Where Puso failed to target the proper audience, Weng Saxoshin, a noted military commander and Realm spy, built his power base among his own men. He gradually realigned the faith and loyalties of his troops over a period of 10 years, and by RY 65, they were secretly loyal to the Scarlet Empress. Some living in the outlying community of Scareng, where Weng's men were stationed, also found themselves part of Weng's cabal and helped plan to upset Lookshy's defenses long enough for the Fourth Imperial Legion to force its way into the city. The scheme might have worked, if Weng himself had not spilled the secret to an acquaintance. While the details of this confession are not known, the results are. Weng was hanged, and his soldiers were scattered when the news of their treachery broke. Many were tried for treason and drowned in the Inland Sea.

The Realm Invasions

In the year 57, the Realm dispatched the Fourth Imperial Legion to the Scavenger Lands in a campaign to persuade holdout regimes to submit to the Empress's yoke. While the Fourth Imperial Legion avoided Lookshy and the Seventh Legion in the early days of the campaign (due to negotiations deliberately prolonged by both parties), Lookshy still managed to play an important role in the defense of its neighbors. The Seventh Legion rallied local tribes and provided arms, training and detachments of officers and infantrymen to neighboring states, which managed, in a few cases, to hold the Fourth Imperial Legion at bay for years.

In RY 69, the Fourth Imperial Legion ended its assault on the Scavenger Lands, retreating to the safety of conquered cities and leaving the few free states in relative peace. These wars caused ruinous damage throughout Lookshy's hinterland and the wider region. Entire communities suffered, and many daimyos approached Lookshy for aid. Lookshy welcomed these daimyos as clients, subjecting their lands and people to Lookshyan rule in return for the Seventh Legion's protection.

Six years later, the Realm disgorged four legions to the Scavenger Lands, one of which confronted Lookshy directly. Thanks to the Seventh Legion's foresight, though, Lookshy was ready. The city had spent years strengthening relations and communication with neighboring states, and it used this network to devise land and naval defenses. While these operations were sometimes seen as unfairly lucrative for Lookshy, most partners in such contracts had little issue with the results, as their communities saw the fruits of Lookshy's efforts in the form of safe trade routes and shipping lanes.

War did come home for Lookshy, however. After several unsuccessful attempts at a promontory invasion, the Fourth Imperial Legion broke through the Lookshy Wall and burned the hinterland beyond, slaying thousands and destroying everything in its path. By the time the Fourth Legion reached Lookshy, however (having wasted days burning and pillaging), the city was locked up tight, siege-response plans in development for decades were enacted, and the city was transformed into a self-sufficient fortress. Far from starved, Lookshy's population held their city for over a year and repelled the attackers. The Fourth Legion's siege engines were no match for Lookshy's highly organized defenses and anti-siege devices.

As the Realm's invasion forces suffered defeat after defeat, the Seventh Legion smuggled a soulbreaker orb into the surrounding imperial camp. This device destroyed the souls of more than three quarters of the enemy's numbers and left the rest battered, confused and in retreat. These survivors were cut down as chaos ensued on the field of battle. Intent on ending the threat once and for all, the Seventh Legion extended its victory by marching to Great Forks, where it met and destroyed the remainder of the Fourth Imperial Legion.

Soon after this defeat, the Realm withdrew from the region but continued to molest merchant vessels along the coast. While some nations responded to this aggression by issuing letters of marque, Nefvarin ordered the formation of a navy and the production of new naval craft, to protect the shipping lanes from "the Empress's marauders."

The Realm's final, and largest, assault on the Scavenger lands began in the year 88 and lasted for less than a year. Lookshy itself was once again besieged, and fighting spread

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throughout the promontory and beyond. By this time, the Seventh Legion had redoubts placed in key strategic points across the Scavenger Lands. This network managed to isolate the Realm's forces, disrupt their communications and prevent the easy installation of reinforcements. Despite Lookshy's preparedness, however, this final assault was also the bloodiest. Thousands perished as the Realm unleashed potent sorcery and the fury of its greatest First Age weapons on the land and its people. Their efforts weren't enough, as the Empress finally recalled her armies in the wake of defeat after defeat, but the toll was high for Lookshy and its surroundings. Dozens of formerly free cities came to Lookshy for aid and protection and agreed to become its clients.

The League of Many Rivers

Lookshy threw in with the various free-city states to form the League of Many Rivers in RY 95 to foster good relations with its trading partners and to better provide for the defense of the region. Knowing that Lookshy stood at the probable doorstep of any further Realm invasion and that the fate of the region likely depended on Lookshy's fate, Nefvarin sanctioned the various treaties and agreements fully committing Lookshy to the League.

The Client Wars

In RY 111, ambassadors from the client states of Mugadesh, Helz, Lugwaal, Starshalla and Werendut, and many citizens of these places and others, flocked to Lookshy to complain of the many abuses wreaked upon them. "We fought for independence from the Scarlet Empress with you," their petition read. "We spilled enemy blood by your side and fought with as much valor and courage as you. And yet you forever despise us, as a father treats with an unforeseen stepson." The complaint hinged upon the General Staff's refusal of even helotry rights to the client states and the steep taxes levied on them. When the General Staff refused to consider the matter, pointing to signed and ratified contracts, the client states launched a problematic, though unexpected attack.

The client states were, of course, no match for the Seventh Legion. While the conflict lasted, the General Staff referred to it not as a war, but as an unfortunate political misunderstanding. The foe—poorly armed farmers and other ill-trained, desperate men—did not warrant the application of potent weaponry or entire field forces. Rather than crush the rebellion, the General Staff dispatched small units, hoping for a politically quiet campaign and for as little damage and as few casualties as possible. In spite of their inadequacies, the client states carried on for seven weeks and managed to expel a number of garrisons (most of whom had been ordered to refrain from entering combat with the clients) from their lands before ultimately surrendering.

Following the laying down of arms, the General Staff, many members of which had been moved by the clients' valor, held hearings on how to proceed with such unhappy foreign subjects. They decided that those who would voluntarily relocate to Lookshy and free whatever slaves they possessed would be granted helotry and all the rights and responsibilities accompanying such an honor. As a result, Lookshy's population grew eightfold over the next year, necessitating the construction of several new districts and hinterland communities. For those who wished freedom, they could have it, but Lookshy would not remove its garrisons. Lookshy ceased taxation on the client states as well. These concessions halted the rebellion, and even though fighting continued sporadically for another several months, the Client Wars came to an end.

Never again would Lookshy engage in any form of imperialism. The mere suggestion of taking a state as a client, through war or otherwise, is even today looked upon as unthinkable and obscene.

Civil Wars

With the Realm no longer perceived as a threat, the River Province states had time to reflect on regional politics and their relative wealth and power. What many leaders of the age realized was that Lookshy, savior that it was, controlled the destiny of the region through military might and commercial brilliance. Great Forks, Nexus, Sijan, the Marukan Alliance—all the significant powers of the Scavenger Lands—made their dissatisfaction known at League conferences and in secret conferences held among themselves. Perhaps they were encouraged by the General Staff's evenhandedness with the client states a decade before, for they brought forth a list of requests—worded as demands—guaranteeing Lookshy's continued services to the River Provinces, only at drastically reduced expenses. Lookshy's ambassadors howled with laughter and accused their neighbors of being ingrates and cravens before the entire conference, infuriating not only the complainants, but the League entire. Many nations that would normally have sided with Lookshy took issue with such arrogance and remained neutral. Others joined with Lookshy's critics.

Over the next dozen years, skirmishes and brief wars erupted throughout the region. These conflicts were almost always restrained exercises, as no nation wished all-out war with Lookshy. Lookshy, for its part, preferred to keep its forces spread throughout the Scavenger Lands to better defend it, rather than to consolidate it for the sake of an internecine war. The battles with Lookshy were curious and unprecedented and ill fated, for Lookshy was in the peculiar position of having largely trained and armed the enemies it now faced. While the defiant nations attempted to develop their own tactics, their entire military structure had been built according to the Seventh Legion model, allowing the Seventh Legion to almost effortlessly predict its enemies' next move.

This series of conflicts came to a zenith over a minor water rights dispute that drew in nearly the entirety of the River Province. Many of these nations finally committed to all-or-nothing war with Lookshy, calling up all reserve forces,

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and putting every last resource and weapon at their disposal on the battlefield. Even with such drive, the depletion of treasuries and thousands of lives lost, Lookshy put down the enemy forces, but at a terrible cost. The Sandy River region was devastated by the aftermath—fallout energies from First Age weaponry burned and scarred the countryside and poisoned the waters, entire peoples were extinguished, and the bitter truth was finally made painfully apparent. Lookshy was master, whether anyone liked it or not. While some believed it for the best, others would never forgive it for how their neighbors, their cousins, were so unceremoniously swept from Creation.

Further Invasions

Three foreign invasions commenced on the heels of the previous century's civil wars. The first, from the reliably hostile Realm, came just a few years after the fighting ended, in 301. The Seventh Legion's swift response to the attack earned back some of the faith it had lost in recent years. In fact, the near-instantaneous defeat of the Imperial legions by the relatively spent and haggard Seventh Legion, a force that had not stopped fighting for decades, seemed more like an afterthought. The defeat, just south of Sijan, earned Lookshy a princely sum from the ransom of significant personages, which Lookshy used exclusively for the fortification and renovation of its four remaining foreign redoubts, constructing not merely stronger walls and armaments, but barracks enough to house troops native to their respective regions. As a final display of good faith, the redoubts flew the flags of their host countries, maintaining that nation's laws as well as Lookshy's. Lookshy still holds this official policy, though Lookshy's laws are considered primary.

Later, in 364, the Arczeckh tribes invaded the League's southern reaches. While the horde never menaced Lookshy directly, the Seventh Legion was on hand to assist assailed nations. It did so most notably toward the end of the conflict at the site of Nechara, where Taimyo White and the Fourth Field Force clashed with the Arczeckh chieftain Mokuu and his army. While the horde fought savagely, the barbarians were no match for White's terrible sorcery, as he called eyes of blood-red fire to gaze down upon the enemy, dripping flames from the sky, incinerating them where they stood. Mokuu himself was reduced to snowy ash, and even White himself eventually died from the aftereffects of the occult flames.

In 547, the Fair Folk invaded the Scavenger Lands once more, invoking terror throughout the region, but in Lookshy most acutely. For the average citizen, Lookshy stood a very real chance of being destroyed, and many considered Lookshy's people and culture in danger of being lost to history. Rumors spread that the Villanua Potenci had returned with No-Lion, now an all-powerful fae ghost, at its head. Every ship that appeared on the horizon was a raksha war galley to their minds. Many helots hid in their homes for months. This rather unusual behavior belied the fact that the Seventh Legion had faced the raksha many times over the centuries. But this instance seemed different. As time progressed, news came of nations laid waste, great armies cut down, ancient spirit kings devoured. While the Seventh Legion played its part for the region, its field forces could not be everywhere at once, and there were still those who would not welcome them into their lands. As the war ended, a new military alliance was proposed, and the Confederation of Rivers was born.

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Turning Point

The middle of the sixth century marks the first major turning point in Lookshy's history. Lookshy's first 550 years are notable for demonstrating its vitality and power. Born out of the ashes of a fallen city-state, Lookshy's citizens carved out a civilization remarkable for its mastery of military tactics, individualistic philosophy and noble character. While this period is largely a history of war, the period following the second raksha invasion marks the beginning of more subtle developments in government, public works, economics and politics. While many other nations' recent history is noteworthy for infighting and a general inability to unite for a common cause, Lookshy's leaders tended to look past trivial divisive matters and concentrate on the importance of a singular vision guiding the nation's progress.

With many other nations in the Scavenger Lands, Lookshy become a signatory to the Confederation of Rivers in RY 557. While many of the signatories viewed the Confederation as a political shield or means to legally make war on other nations, the General Staff took (and continues to take) it very seriously. The General Staff was tired of being at odds with every nation in the League and was adamant that this new confederation should last.

In 559, a plan was put into action to construct many public buildings in every district and hinterland community, including baths, courts of justice, civicals, monuments and parks.

In 577, Gens Amilar commissioned the construction of a paved civic square in the hinterland community of Wasuvi. This miniature complex of buildings housed state-of-the-art bath facilities, a civical with finely apportioned offices and in-house court of justice, and a recreational area with gardens and sports grounds. Two months later, Gens Karal, another prominent family, commissioned a new military bastion, training grounds and command center to be constructed in Javasavi, another community in Lookshy's hinterland. The family criticized Gens Amilar for wasting money and resources on such a frivolous display.

Hence began the tradition of hinterland sponsorship, a combination of civic goodwill and inter-Gentes one-upmanship that has managed to transform Lookshy's outlying farming, fishing and craft communities from dens of poverty to palettes of largesse. Soon after the Gentes got caught up in the practice, other wealthy families made their own, at first modest, endowments.

Recent Events

The Seventh Legion was instrumental in putting down Thorns' army during its recent Realm-assisted invasion of the western Confederation states. While the conflict continued for two years and Lookshy was briefly besieged, the Seventh Legion was methodical and exacting in its defeat of many Dragon-Blooded-led field forces. The most trying battle, the battle of Mishaka, in which Thorns was finally defeated, involved a coalition of many nations accompanied by the Seventh Legion's First and Third Field Forces. The battle is modern legend, and is still spoken of with excitement almost 15 years later.

The rumors of the Empress's disappearance and the news of the Mask of Winters' invasion of Thorns have once again awakened Lookshyans to the possibilities of political instability and war. While Lookshy has always had enemies and its people have never been strangers to war, a dire electricity prevails in the city, as if everyone knows they are sitting on the cusp of a new Age.

People of Lookshy

The warriors of Lookshy believe in a brand of freedom that comes from honor, integrity, honesty and valor. They have little time and few words for foreigners who do not share their outlook, and they commonly treat such folk with open disdain. Lookshyans are a proud, energetic people, as famous for their patriotism as for their mastery of military strategy. They also value self-control, limiting their leisure and keeping to personal dietary, exercise and training regimens. In addition, Lookshyans are a politically active community, with very few eschewing civic duties.

Lookshy exists to support the Seventh Legion, which itself exists to ensure the security of the city and the whole of the Confederation. All residents of the city accept and embrace this ideal. Over the centuries, it has become the very meaning of their lives.

Lookshyan Outlook

The people of Lookshy hold a philosophical credo that is as self-serving as it is objectively unjust, while at the same time preening themselves as the guardians of justice in the Scavenger Lands. Boiled down, this credo states that only Lookshyans, who have earned their just laws through trials and fierce determination, deserve to live according to them. As such, not all men are worthy of justice. Such a doctrine is puzzling, especially when it is not unusual to hear a typical Lookshyan utter in the same breath that tyranny is evil and should be eradicated when possible.

Lookshy's philosophical outlook is a creation of the General Staff's propaganda machine, at once legitimizing its rule and glorifying its achievements—a feature hardly unique. In Lookshy, however, the propaganda is not merely believed, followed and repeated by its lower class residents. Rather, it is a weapon, a tool, a warning to other nations that Lookshy really *is* united. Instead of being used by Lookshy's elite as a blunt instrument to dominate its own populace, the propagandistic outlook unique to Lookshy is more like a flaming sword wielded by all.

Leisure

Most daily activities in Lookshy center around either an individual's profession or her family, with not much time to spare. Factor in rest and meals, and it seems like Lookshyans live rather joyless, robotic lives. It is true that they spend much less time participating in leisure activities for their

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own sake, but they do find time for social gatherings, games and other more personal hobbies.

Reading out loud from popular books is a favorite way to relax for soldiers in barracks, as is playing The Boneyard, a dice game relying as much on guts and creative challenges as on luck. Helot card guilds meet monthly, wherein members spend an evening catching up on gossip, meeting old friends and sampling the newest imported drink over various games of strategy, skill and daring, which are preferred over games relying on pure luck. Games with a military theme, and exotic games imported from the South, are especially popular.

Many Lookshyans of all ranks and classes learn to lay a musical instrument. Most of them play brass instruments, the most popular being the zithyramb, a long, thin, seven-valved trumpet. A few others play the quirethin, a rather complicated baritone apparatus with a brass mouthpiece and 14 thick sinews that the player plucks to create rhythm. Lookshyans have a reputation for being very studious musicians who find it easier than most to technically master their instruments, but who also play with very little emotion or feeling. Many enjoy singing—military songs are learned from childhood—but few are talented. Nonetheless, evenings often include the sounds of residents tunelessly (and loudly) caroling their way home.

Lookshyans appreciate good food. That said, they do not often encounter it at home. Foreign spices have become popular as a measure to make the local fare more exciting, but most agree that nothing compares with sensoulaisa from a real Chiaroscuran kitchen. Standard meals at home usually feature Marukan beef and cheeses, locally produced breads and vegetables and mostly imported beverages such as wines, teas and trebolash, a syrupy brew enjoyed by children and the elderly. Most meals are prepared according to foreign recipes and heavily spiced with Chiaroscuran hot peppers, powdered green mustard and mastixa seeds (touted as the most painfully hot substance to come out of the West). New dishes are dreamt up daily, as rare ingredients aren't always available; this suits most Lookshyans, who will usually try anything on their trencher.

Residents typically like to dress in blue- or red-dyed robes when not uniformed, with little variation in style between the wealthy and the poor, though wealthier persons favor imported silks and sateen over the locally produced cotton. Members of the General Staff wear blue robes with one shoulder uncovered. Furs are generally avoided. In winter, thick, woven military jackets are the fashion. Many wear swords as a part of their daily flair. Whiskers are not in fashion, though moustaches and beards are common in retired men. The typical Lookshyan wears little jewelry, except the occasional finger ring made of local materials. A common mantra, even among the very rich, goes, "We have little use for beads or their makers here. Bring me a sharp sword, and I will show you the greatest of gems."

Virtue and Vice

While Lookshyans pride themselves on their discipline, they are not averse to revelry and carousal during personal time. It is no vice, they believe, to indulge in casual drink or drug use that does not interfere with their duties and those of others. On the other hand, it is considered unpardonable to, say, appear for duty drunk or under the influence of powerful drugs. Those doing so inevitably face lectures, extra duties, courts martial or other, less orthodox penalties.

Dragon-Blooded citizens are more likely than mortals to indulge excessively, but due to their well-known passions, they are permitted the occasional lapse, especially while young. Those caught succumbing to one vice or another in a manner dangerous to self or others, however, usually face court martial proceedings and are duly punished. Those found irredeemable find themselves unceremoniously dismissed from service or even executed.

Lookshyans consider their families to be sacred aspects of their lives. In general, this means loyalty to family elders and the provision of aid and support to the family's youths, though competition with contemporaries is acceptable. With the exception of certain Dragon-Blooded societies, Lookshyans do not stress reproduction as a good for its own sake. It is a civic good but not one that is forced upon residents. As a result, same-sex marriages are not forbidden and carry with them no social stigma.

There is very little class warfare in Lookshy. Poverty is a condition, but it is not a mind-set and certainly not a vice. To confess oneself as poor is no great shame, for there are many great families and time-honored heroes who either came from or fell into poverty. It is much worse to be marked as dishonorable, a coward or a liar.

Residential Ranks

Three distinct rankings separate folk in Lookshy. The first is based on civil status: Every person in Lookshy is either a citizen, a helot, an indentured servant or a metic. The second distinction is based on a family's wealth and fame. These two rankings are in no way correlated—there are wealthy or widely famed helots just as there are poor or obscure citizens. The third is based on military service. While all residents (citizens, helots and indentured servants) are de facto members of the Seventh Legion, on-duty soldiers are accorded special consideration.

Soldiers: Nearly all of Lookshy's inhabitants report for active military duty during their lifetimes (only the infirm and the mad are exempted). During this period of civil service, they are accorded the highest honors and treated with due deference by the rest of Lookshy society.

Citizens: All citizens are free in all respects but one: They may be called upon to serve at any time, whether in defense on the city or in one of the Seventh Legion's numerous military campaigns, spy missions, recon runs, et cetera. Once their military obligations are fulfilled, which is variable

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but usually consists of three tours of duty, they are free even to leave Lookshy and seek their fortunes elsewhere. Few do so, however, as most take pride in their city and hold dear their citizenship. Only citizens, of which there are a little over 10,000, may aspire to public office, speak at council or enter into contracts with indentured servants. Those citizens who choose to leave Lookshy may always return but must do so as helots (though they may petition the General Staff for restoration of their citizenship).

Wealthy citizens are expected to patronize one of the hinterland communities, which usually takes the name of the patron family. There are no set guidelines on what form this support should take. Some of the wealthiest families shower their patron villages with luxuries and civil improvements, all in their own honor, while others provide little more than their name, and the corresponding communities live mean lives of poverty.

Poor citizens are expected to keep up appearances as well as they are able. Families fallen on hard times tend to cling to their civil rights and responsibilities—participation at council, service to sponsored communities—as well as they can, as it is frequently all they have left with which to distinguish themselves.

As a group, citizens tend to be suspicious of novelty or any suggestion that Lookshyan society is outmoded, archaic, obscure or otherwise due for a change. They generally trust the system that has worked well for centuries. The laws in Lookshy are practically static, therefore, as few citizens see a need for reform.

The state provides for elderly citizens if their families cannot. Those who require care are granted a modest stipend and accommodations in one of the residence districts.

It is considered uncouth for citizens to have, or at least to show, a distaste for helots. Even the rude and unsophisticated helots living in the hinterland do not receive much disregard. Instead, it is considered a sign of good grace to treat helots in an almost patronizing fashion, though without irony.

Helots: Numbering over 100,000, helots are the backbone of Lookshy society, making up Lookshy's serf class and the bulk of its infantry. Over the centuries, helots have contributed the most to political stability during peacetime and remain enthusiastically committed to Lookshy's interests in time of war. Helots do most of the actual work in Lookshy, from papermaking to carpentry, food production to road maintenance.

Despite their contributions, helots do not enjoy the same rights and freedoms as citizens. Although they may attend council, they cannot speak there. They may, however, join trade organizations and elect a member to speak on their behalf. They cannot own land but are free to own any other personal property they can afford.

Helots are paid for their work according to the value of their labor, not their social status, with many earning as much as citizens (and sometimes more). As such, some hel-

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ots have managed to accumulate considerable wealth. The possession of wealth, however, does not bring with it the opportunity to move into more desirable accommodations. The Seventh Legion provides standardized housing for all helots, regardless of means.

Like citizens, helots are provided for in their old age. Although the retirement stipend is modest, it is sufficient for the needs of the average helot. (For some it is a windfall.) Retired helots often join reserve legions that offer support to soldiers should the city ever fall under attack. These legions have not entered combat in centuries, however.

While they don't enjoy all the benefits of citizenship, helots generally do not think of themselves as second-class citizens. After all, when Lookshy goes to war, citizens and helots stand side by side as soldiers. Helots consider the differences between citizens and themselves as more economic and familial, rather than political. They tend to see citizens as deserving of the rights given them, whether through valor on the battlefield or descent from a great family. They believe this, partly, because they each have the opportunity to elevate their station, as helots can be promoted to full citizenship status with the endorsement of the General Staff. Indeed, once per year, the General Staff selects a number of worthy helots to promote to citizenship. The criterion for selecting worthies is not set, nor is the number of helots to elect. Some years pass with few, or even no, helots being granted the honor, while in other years, dozens are elevated. Most helots chosen for promotion have proven themselves in battle or possess some famous quality, such as genius, civic loyalty, artistic ability or, in the case of wealthy helots, philanthropy.

While they do not hate the citizens as a class, the helots of Lookshy have little patience and no respect for even the highest-ranking citizen who gains his wealth or position dishonorably. When the helots discover such improprieties, blood flows in the streets.

Helots cannot independently leave the promontory without travel papers, which the General Staff grants only with good reason. Many helots travel extensively as soldiers and, with few exceptions, are pleased to spend their off-duty days on the promontory.

Metics: Traders, ambassadors, foreign merchants and students at the various salons and military academies are considered metics. They are usually under observation and treated with guarded suspicion. Only through honorable action can metics gain Lookshy's trust. In general, metics are tolerated, and even treated graciously at times, but never seen as friends without the evidence of action.

Though they have fewer rights than even the helots, metics have a definite legal status. Their names are on file, and their comings and goings are closely recorded. While they may live in Lookshy, they cannot journey beyond the Fourth Ring or the Lower City without a transit pass. They pay a higher tax rate than citizens and helots, but they may demand the same protections. They may own property, but not real estate (though they can rent). They may enter into contracts, but disputes are almost always arbitrated in favor of Lookshy's native residents. Metics may even marry into Lookshyan families, though any resulting children are still considered metics.

Indentured Servants: Those who find themselves in economic misfortune, or those found guilty of a serious crime, may be forced to sign themselves into service to a citizen in exchange for room, board, a modest stipend and forgiveness of debts.

Indentured service contracts must be notarized by the Adjutant General. They are of variable length but cannot exceed five years. At the conclusion of the contract, the servant regains his former social status. While the contract is in force, however, an indentured servant relinquishes most rights. While they pay no taxes, indentured servants cannot appear at council or even work legally outside of their contract, nor can they enter into any other business contract.

Indentured servants cannot be assaulted or otherwise abused by their heritors. Like other residents, indentured servants can be called to active duty to defend Lookshy, with no prejudice as to where they are stationed or the duties with which they are trusted.

Dragon-Blooded Citizens

Lookshy is the largest enclave of Dragon-Blooded outside the Realm—nearly one in every 100 residents is of Terrestrial blood.

The Dragon-Blooded of Lookshy are always considered to be on active military duty, even if they technically are not. Therefore, they stand at the highest echelon of society throughout their lives. Beyond the honors accorded soldiers, however, they receive no special benefit with respect to the law or tradition. Their natural advantages are considered benefit enough—and they are expected to outperform those not similarly gifted.

Lookshy accepts Dragon-Blooded refugees from all over Creation, including the Realm. It does not do so blindly, however, carefully screening each applicant. Refugees typically begin their careers in the foreign service and remain under close observation for years or until their commanders are certain of their loyalty and good character. Those deemed unfit are politely asked to leave. Those who are accepted gain citizenship rights and are permitted to live in Lookshy, to marry into other Dragon-Blooded families and to pursue a profession (though military careers are always encouraged).

Many of the Dragon-Bloods in Lookshy are the result of very deliberate breeding programs. Dragon-Blooded marriage societies arrange marriages between historically compatible types. These societies publicly promote the good breeding and fertility of Terrestrials for the good of the state and are praised for their civic-mindedness in assuring the long life of the city. In practice, they tend to be hard-line manipulators

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Slavery

The helots of Lookshy are not slaves. To suggest as much is cause for dispute or, at worst, assault. This point of view is not reserved to the helots. The very idea of any Lookshy native being taken as a slave is repugnant to all. And for a citizen of Lookshy to hold slaves is nearly as offensive. Not only is it a grave dishonor for a city that claims to love freedom, it is a serious security risk, inviting attack. For this reason, slavery is a crime worthy of social demotion and imprisonment.

The few slaves living in Lookshy are not considered residents, are not included in the official census and have no legal standing. But they are not considered slaves. These are war captives and the slaves of conquered foes who have nowhere else to go or no desire to return to their homes. Some languish in prison. Others sell themselves as indentured servants. All are generally ignored by the populace at large, and those who are not official state prisoners must find creative or illegal ways to survive if they wish to exist anywhere above the level of mere subsistence.

Lookshy affords slaves few rights. They have no right to speak at council and cannot serve the Seventh Legion in any official capacity (which severely limits their employability). Like metics, slaves cannot travel beyond the Fourth Ring or the Lower City without a transit pass, which, for them, are nearly impossible to come by. Slaves are protected from unnecessary violence and other injustices such as theft, and they can marry metics, helots or indentured servants (with the approval of the servant's heritor). They are also permitted private ownership of personal effects (books, tools, musical instruments and such), but not real estate or weapons.

Slaves who are married to Lookshy residents are still considered slaves. The children of slaves may be emancipated and granted helot status. This is done on a case-by-case basis with the approval of the Adjutant General. If the parents are both slaves or if only one parent has raised the child, for whatever reason, three sponsors of at least helot status must attest to the parents' loyalty to Lookshy. If the Adjutant General's office accepts these statements, the slave's children become helots.

obsessed with strengthening bloodlines. Of the highest value to these societies is a mating that produces the most number of children who Exalt—and Exalt well. Most Terrestrial families, and all of the Gentes, are affiliated with one or more of these fraternities. As such, most Dragon-Blooded do not marry for love, though they are expected to remain monogamous (so as not to disturb any ongoing eugenic programs).

The Gentes of the Seventh Legion

The typical Lookshyan is proud of his nation and its reputation. It is a pride that extends to a healthy self-esteem in many aspects of Lookshy natives' lives, regardless of social station or wealth. Belonging to an important family is also considered important in Lookshy society, not because of all of the nepotistic possibilities in being aligned by blood with the likes of the powerful, but because it augments their pride. Being a member of a great house in the greatest city is, for many, an honor beyond all others. To malign one of these houses is to invite retribution, though the vengeful act will usually involve more political strategy than swordplay, unless the initial insult was violent as well.

The five major Gentes of Lookshy are the most powerful families in the city. They are each built around major Terrestrial bloodlines, venerable family histories, traditions of martial prowess and collections of First Age technology. Tracking genealogy is a favorite pastime for the Gentes, and most have accurate accounts of their family history dating back to the Contagion. Some families claim descent from First Age heroes or spirits, but most of these claims have no basis in fact.

The Gentes' children have a few advantages over others, in that members of their family, and all of their friends, are always looking out for them and their interests. This also means that such children are expected to comport themselves in a way that shows their Gens in the most honorable light. Children who bring dishonor to the Gens in any way are usually dealt with harshly.

Gens Amilar (Air): The youngest of the Gentes, this house is based on the bloodline of Taimyo Vondy Beulen. Like Gens Karal, the Amilar family made the bulk of its fortune early in Lookshy's history, dealing in rare books and manuscripts. As such, Gens Amilar has the most extensive private library in the city and operates many public ones as well. The family's hinterland community, Wasuvi, enjoys a fine collection housed in a stately hall. Gens Amilar produces more teachers and lay artisans than any other family. Most of Gens Amilar's scions are Interventionists, though the younger generation tends to be Purists.

Gens Karal (Fire): The Karal family traces its bloodline from the first Camp Liaison Officer, Karal Shan Zu, and takes great pride in its military heritage, with many military leaders among them. Traditionally, its scions are always the first to suggest marshalling troops for war, so long as it is a good cause and serves Lookshy's interests. This Gens has a respectable fortune, earned and invested long ago. Karals tend to be frugal with their resources, but have provided well for their sponsored hinterland community, Javasavi. Few merchant princes or sorcerer-engineers belong to this family by blood, though a few have married into it. These

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individuals are usually treated with caution, however—even those who have been in the family for decades—and they are never given any kind of access to the family purse strings. Politically, the Gens Karal are Mercenaries, with Interventionist leanings.

Gens Maheka (Earth): Founded in Realm Year 323 by a well-placed combat engineer, this family has acquired great wealth through its controlling interest in many of Lookshy's foundries and weapons manufactories. Known to be scrupulously honest and upright, the family is also the most loyal to the Shogunate Bureaucracy and the biggest martinets with regard to the Legion's mandates and the Immaculate faith. Gens Maheka is considered the model family, and even the Yushoto look to it for proper modes of behavior at times. The Mahekas' hinterland community, Langtang, is modestly apportioned but by no means lacking in comforts. Politically, they are nearly all Mercenaries.

Gens Teresu (Water): The Teresu family traces its lineage back to Admiral Teresu Mitaki, Chumyo Nefvarin's fleet admiral. Since that time, the Gens has preserved its influence over naval matters and has developed a minor but thriving sea trade reaching as far as the Western Islands. This family produces many naval leaders in both navies and, consequently, has a significant influence in the state's naval matters. The Teresus' hinterland community, Patna, is a place of splendor sitting along the banks of the Yanaze, containing many First Age ruins and state of the art naval training facilities. Politically, the family is split between Isolationists and Mercenaries.

Gens Yushoto (Wood): This family's origins include many celebrated heroes who fought during the Contagion, but the individual revered for bringing such great individuals together was Yushoto Baraka, the Seventh Legion's chief sorcerer-engineer. Gens Yushoto is involved in many aspects of Lookshy society and does not seek to pressure its children into any particular career. Politically, the Yushotos have no allegiance to any particular faction. The Gens Yushoto hinterland community, Birat Bazaz, is well taken of, but it does not contain any extravagant structures. The Yushoto family is quite egalitarian, however, and its members generally shun extravagance, seeing themselves as little different from the helots. They have even unofficially adopted several helots from Fansari (who's sponsor Gens has fallen into obscurity) to whom they have taken a particular liking. The Yushoto family is also somewhat aloof from the other Gentes, preferring to keep its drama to itself. Other Gentes, especially minor ones, tend to see the Yushotos as proud for the wrong reasons.

Minor Gentes

While the major Gentes are the strong pillars of Lookshy society, the minor Gentes ebb and flow according to the wiles of fate. Many remain important for centuries, while others attain no lasting significance. At any given time, a dozen or so families have favor, wealth, influence and popularity enough to make their mark. These minor Gentes are built from the same bedrock as the major Gentes, though Terrestrial breeding is more or less a concern, depending on the Gens. Some minor Gentes, like the once-prominent Nefvarin, model themselves on the great Gentes. Others are more concerned with political influence or wealth. Mortal Gentes, of course, have no interest in Terrestrial breeding, but they have their own ideas on the production of a fine pedigree. Their notions are often derived from the breeding philosophies of the major Gentes, though.

Government

Lookshy's government is dominated by the Seventh Legion's General Staff, a six-person assembly of mortal and Dragon-Blooded military officers. Most are like-minded on defense but have different non-military interests.

Lookshy's government is non-expansionist, though not quite isolationist. They are exclusionists, favoring a tightly controlled and defended city-state that welcomes outsiders under strictly maintained conditions, with definite boundaries in place between those who belong and those who do not.

Council of the General Staff

The General Staff presides over the Council, which meets weekly or as needed in emergency cases. Citizens and helots are welcome to attend, though only citizens and certain elected helots may speak. Each Council is divided into two phases, the politic and the public. Most matters discussed in the politic phase concern military personnel matters and dry, policy-related minutia, though, occasionally, war proposals, moral orations and patriotic odes awaken the slumbering helots and invite prideful cheers. This phase is rigidly scheduled according to topics, with a member of the General Staff giving a short primer on the topic before it is discussed.

The Council is also the place where public opinion can be given voice: Complaints, suggestions, endorsements and castigations can all be heard here on a fairly regular basis during the public phase of the proceedings. Those who wish to speak during this phase must first present their case to a legator (a functionary of the General Staff) before the proceedings. Speakers have three minutes to speak, though anyone permitted to speak may move to permit an extension if the topic so warrants.

Politics

While Lookshy's primary outlook is one of cooperation and unity of purpose, the finitude of resources demands that difficult decisions must be made on how best to allocate them. Each industry, military branch and civil concern has arguments supporting the primacy of its needs, and each political faction has a philosophical outlook it deems appropriate for the times. Enter politics. While Lookshy's political struggles

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are rather stoic compared to other places, and none have ever led to (open) bloodshed, tempers do flare and perhaps unfortunate words are spoken when one group's best interests are selected over another's. But large-scale conflicts between political factions or other large concerns are rare. For the most part, no political entity is willing to compromise Lookshy's security by making the nation appear divided and weak.

Historically, the rate of change in Lookshy's political arena is staggeringly slow. This is not surprising, given both that the government and the conservative military are one and the same and that well-functioning policies have been in force for centuries. For matters that do not require immediate action, the General Staff rarely enacts policy changes without years of study and contemplation.

Most organized political factions do not concern themselves with specific industries or military branches. Their outlooks are more general and concern Lookshy's role in the wider region of the River Province. Five major factions occupy the stage, though many minor, less popular outlooks are also represented.

Imperialists: Imperialists support covert interference in foreign regimes and the wooing of powerful foreign houses so that the Seventh Legion can someday claim sovereignty over other states. This faction is the least powerful of the five major ones, as its ideals are still out of fashion. Recently, however, with the incident at Thorns and the disappearance of the Empress, the Imperialists have gained in popularity, as many feel that the best way to guarantee security in such uncertain times is to control as much of the region as possible.

Interventionists: Lookshy is quite active in River Province politics, actively defending much of the territory, training and arming foreign armies and participating in the Confederation of Rivers. Interventionists would have Lookshy participate even more, perhaps to the point of dominating the political landscape and resurrecting the Shogunate Bureaucracy. Why not, they reason, have a single army under a Lookshy-dominated Shogunate? That would surely make the Confederation more secure.

Isolationists: The Isolationists believe that Lookshy has its fingers stretched too far and sunk into too many pies. They presume that Lookshy's wealth and military resources should benefit Lookshy alone. They see the Confederation as irrelevant at best, potentially involving Lookshy in struggles a thousand leagues away that in no way impacts it. The most extreme of these Isolationists seek to cut all non-commercial ties to other nations, dismantling foreign redoubts and recalling all garrisons.

Mercenaries: The most powerful faction in Lookshy, the Mercenaries believe that the current state of affairs is optimum for guaranteeing the security of Lookshy. Hence, they do whatever they can to preserve the status quo. Their opposition to the other parties' lines of argumentation has, in recent years, become somewhat contentious and accusatory as these rivals gain more support from the people. While the Mercenaries would like to see a return of the Shogunate, most are willing to await the coming of a true heir.

The Pursuers of Immaculate Purity (Purists): The Purists advocate a moral crusader policy, pitting the Seventh Legion as tool to be used against the wicked and heretical in the Scavenger Lands. They wish to restore the Shogunate as soon as possible, but only in order to spread the faith of the Immaculate Dragons. Most of Lookshy's citizenry shies away from this party, adherents of which can often be seen on Third and Fourth Ring street corners accosting passersby with their pitches.

Helot Factions: Helot factions are concerned more with the interests of a particular community or industry than general philosophy. While helots, as individuals, cannot speak at Council, groups of them may elect a spokesman to do so. Even though they do not carry the influence of the five major factions, most are content just to have their voices heard.

Alliances

Lookshy does not form alliances with cowards or those it cannot trust. That said, it is no surprise that the city has few true allies. Despite contracts, vows and treaties, most Confederation states cannot be called friends. With few exceptions, these nations frequently seek to discover loopholes in contracts, to fabricate false dangers and to stage inane protests in pursuit of their own ends. Lookshy considers itself the parent that is taken advantage of by children that it must protect for their own good, so these obvious ploys are often overlooked or dealt with calmly.

Great Forks: While it might seem strange at first blush, Great Forks is one of Lookshy's most dependable and stable allies. Officers from Great Forks are the most common foreign students in Lookshy salons, and Great Forks' traders have reserved spots in the District of Trade's markets. Many Lookshyans deal with the people of Great Forks as they would any other foreigner, though their officers and merchant princes often merit superior treatment in the eyes of most Lookshyans. Generally welcoming, Lookshyans have no real reservations about the folk of Great Forks aside from their insistence on heresy (which only Lookshyan Purists take great issue with) and their tendency to dwell on certain ignoble aspects of Lookshy's past.

The Marukan Alliance: Lookshy is currently very closely allied with the free-spirited Marukan "horselords." All of the seventh Legion's horses are Marukan steeds, widely known as the finest available. The Marukan Redoubt is a welcome fixture in Marukan lands, and the two nations exchange training and intelligence on a regular basis. Lookshyans have a romantic fascination with the Marukani, who live such different lives and yet are so similar in their love of liberty.

Metagalapa: While not generally known in Lookshy, most of Metagalapa's Dragon-Blooded trace their ancestry back to a talon of Seventh Legion scouts. Their lineage and

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battle prowess have earned the favor of Lookshy, which has signed many lucrative contracts for various metals in exchange for grain, arms and training. Most of Lookshy's helots do not know where the visiting hawkriders come from. While tales abound—some believe they are spirits—only those who have served extensively in Hundred Kingdoms' territory and the few lucky scouts given the chance to train with the hawkriders on their floating mountain know exactly whence they come. When the hawkriders arrive, it is a minor wonder.

Enemies

It is the Lookshyan way to make light of the enemy. This mindset, applicable in the case of all enemies but the raksha, stems from the Lookshyan sense of national superiority. Lookshy's people respect their enemies insofar as they are worthy combatants and dismiss all others as insignificant.

Linowan: The Linowan, commercial pirates, allies to the Realm and often friends to the raksha, have been chronically troublesome. While the Seventh Legion has no desire to confront the Linowan directly in a formal war for fear of brewing a larger conflict (even though its officers are certain of victory), it by no means treats the Linowan with a gentle hand. Linowan pirates and raiders are considered fair game for the Seventh Legion, and open war is not out of the question. Lookshy has been at war with the Linowan three times in the past 200 years. Typical Lookshyans consider the Linowan hangers-on and bores. If not for the Realm or the raksha, the Linowan would be less than nothing, many Lookshyans believe. This is in the face of many successful attacks on Lookshy's economic interests, some resulting in the ruination of Lookshy families. While the Linowan are not the noblest or the most powerful of enemies, they are certainly cunning and have managed to become a serious concern for Lookshy's merchant princes.

The Raksha: The people of Lookshy hate and fear the Fair Folk. While not technically at war, Lookshy will not enter into any kind of agreement, treaty or contract with the raksha and will treat with them under only the direst circumstances. The raksha have not appeared on the promontory in force for centuries, but the Seventh Legion has assisted other River Province nations against them dozens of times over the years. Should the raksha manage to attack Lookshy directly, it would be difficult to maintain order.

The Realm: The General Staff treats the Realm with wary hostility during the best of times and has never shown it what the Empress would have referred to as "the proper respect." While Lookshy signs treaties of non-aggression at

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times, it does so with the knowledge that the Realm's navies will violate them within months. Lookshy never trades with the Realm and does not officially permit its residents to travel there. Unofficially, the Intelligence Directorate has many spies placed throughout the Realm, with a dozen or so on the Blessed Isle itself.

The citizens of Lookshy widely consider the Realm's people to be soft and spoiled, akin to children who have been handed every luxury, only to squander it on corruption and a lumbering empire. As such, Lookshyans have no fear of the Realm, believing that they possess more First Age tactical weaponry than the Realm and have better trained soldiers.

Thorns: The Mask of Winters is the true tyrant of Thorns—no one in Lookshy wishes to make war on Thorns' suffering citizenry. Currently, the General Staff considers the Deathlord to be the greatest potential threat facing the security of Lookshy. It is unlikely in the extreme that the General Staff will ever agree to any contracts, trade or treaties with Thorns until its tyrant is ousted. Any movement by the Mask of Winters into the River Province region will result in open war.

While the people of Lookshy have heard of the Mask of Winters' coup, they do not understand who or what the Deathlord is or what he is capable of. As a result, the Council floor has been rife with motions to send troops to Thorns in a measure to dethrone the Mask of Winters. There has also been recent talk of annexing Thorns for the foreseeable future to prevent further incursions. As time goes on, more and more are willing to accept this proposal.

Other Political Concerns

Lookshy is a worldly nation, with ambassadors, military contingents and spies placed throughout the Scavenger Lands, the South, the North and even the Blessed Isle. Given the scope of the arena in which it chooses to operate, it is noteworthy that politically, Lookshy is more of a homebody, entrenching itself so much in regional politics that it has not time or energy left for the concerns of the wider world. This is no accident, but a part of Lookshy's foreign policy, which focuses on regional security to such a degree that no nation would dare attempt an invasion. As Lookshy is not imperialist, the General Staff has little interest in the movements of foreign armies, unless they approach too closely to the Scavenger Lands.

The Anathema: While the Solar Exalted are not hunted or shunned in Lookshy, their arrival is not considered good news. Peaceable Anathema have come to Lookshy and found cordial accommodations for the length of their visits, but their unpredictability combined with the raw power at their disposal makes them difficult to befriend.

The Confederation of Rivers: Lookshy's history with nearly every nation in the Confederation is a spotty one at best. Without Lookshy, however, the Confederation would be an empty exercise in solidarity. Everyone is aware of this, Lookshy most keenly. Where some nations might use this leverage to extract even more lucrative contracts and assert more dominance of the region, Lookshy has been rather pacific with the Confederation since the incident at Thorns. Preferring to focus on the threat at hand, Lookshy's ambassadors have stressed cooperation, the extension of treaties and their willingness to negotiate fairer contracts with member nations for the sake of preparing a unified front should the Mask of Winters turn his eyes northward.

The Delzahn and Chiaroscuro: Lookshy seems endlessly fascinated with the cunning and mystery of the Delzahn culture, not to mention the spices and other exports the city provides. Merchants, merchant-spies and high-ranking Lookshy officers have been invited to the Tri-Khan's table, and Delzahn warriors occasionally put into port at Lookshy, causing commotion and thrills throughout the city.

Gethamane: The empire-building Haslanti League, with its superior technology, has recently ignored treaties and attacked several of Gethamane's outlying military posts with no provocation, making its intentions no secret. Gethamane's leaders see nothing but war and misery on the horizon, and Lookshy, formerly a friend, has been no help. Because Lookshy has been courting the Haslanti League in preparation for lucrative contracts, it has refused to come to Gethamane's aid. Letters of protest have been sent to Lookshy, but the General Staff, loath as it is to abandon Gethamane, has not responded.

Greyfalls: As a loyal Realm territory, Greyfalls is technically an enemy of Lookshy. Its distance from the Imperial City has led to a certain laxity with respect to official Realm policy, though. Over the last century, there has been little official communication between Lookshy and Greyfalls, and the Seventh Legion has had few encounters with Greyfalls' forces, none of them violent. The silence from Greyfalls worries the General Staff, but as there does not appear to be any threatening movement from Greyfalls, the General Staff is content to wait for Greyfalls to make the first move.

The Haslanti League: The Haslanti League is a conundrum. Many in Lookshy desire friendly relations with it, for the Haslanti nation is rich and has much to trade. Just as many think that the Haslanti are not only amoral and unworthy of Lookshy's friendship, but present a danger to River Province security. The Haslanti are efficient imperialists, and the General Staff would prefer it if they would keep their distance, but they also offer many business and technological opportunities of which the most powerful Gentes wish to take advantage. A trio of ambassadors from Gens Maheka has managed to secure contracts with the Haslanti that provide for an exchange of technologies. This is much to the dissatisfaction of critics who see the escalating relationship as foolish and dangerous.

The Hundred Kingdoms: There is concern that the Hundred Kingdoms might one day unite into a single, formidable power, but this possibility seems very far off indeed.

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Currently, their middling military strength is spent on internal conflicts and their economy and trade potential are of little interest. When necessary, the Seventh Legion operates cautiously in Hundred Kingdoms territory, not out of fear, but to avoid any unnecessary misunderstandings. For their part, the Hundred Kingdoms' armies give the Seventh Legion a wide berth, but any sort of alliance is very unlikely.

Nexus: Most Lookshyans would rather forget about Nexus. They see Nexus as a den of rampant and unfocused commercialism and an overall undisciplined and irresponsible turmoil. Nexus has its own complaints, however, and accuses Lookshy of scapegoating and warmongering and generally disrupting business. Nexus's people also have a long memory and still blame Lookshy for many citywide catastrophes during the last raksha invasion. The Guild is welcome to do business in Lookshy, but only on such a limited basis that it is not worth maintaining a larger presence. The facilities it does have are mostly devoted to moving products through Lookshy on to other destinations.

Sijan: Why Sijan is not a formal ally is a mystery. They have never been in conflict, and they enjoy several lucrative contracts. Lookshy mercenaries routinely patrol Sijan's borders and maintain garrisons outside the city to ensure its security, an arrangement with which Sijan seems happy. In exchange, a company from Sijan's Morticians' Order manages the interment of many of Lookshy's dead in local crypts. Sijan insists on remaining neutral, however, though it frequently supports Lookshy's causes at the Council of the Concordat.

Whitewall: Lookshy's friendly overtures with the Haslanti League have strained its relations with many of Haslanti's Northern neighbors, but none more than Whitewall. Formerly on friendly terms, if not quite allies, Whitewall has since cancelled all of its Lookshy contracts—even for mundane items from Lookshy's merchant princes—and refuses to negotiate new ones. This friction has caused minor economic instability among Lookshy merchants who did considerable business in Whitewall. It has seen the near fall of the Oculoi family and countless metics who rely on good relations with Whitewall. While Lookshy is certainly agreeable to trading with Whitewall, the General Staff has made only a cursory effort to resolve the matter.

The Seventh Legion

The Seventh Legion is not considered the supreme military force without reason. Its weaponry is unrivaled among any army in the Scavenger Lands and even surpasses the potency of the Realm's armaments. Its soldiers are trained from youth and drilled throughout their lives. The location of Lookshy on the promontory allows the Seventh Legion to restrict access to and from the Yanaze, while the Lookshy Wall provides tight security against land forces. High city walls, natural springs, networks of underground passages and hinterlands specifically developed for defense contribute to one of the most defensible cities in the Scavenger Lands.

Rank

The Seventh Legion uses the old Shogunate rank structure with a few minor tweaks. Note that few mortals advance beyond the rank of shozei, and none beyond kazei, mostly due to their relatively short life span.

The Seventh Legion stresses the proper chain of command and insists that orders be passed down the chain by the proper commander to his charges, who pass them on down the line, as appropriate. Therefore, it is unusual to see, say, a kazei issuing direct orders to a lowly sochei except, perhaps, in the heat of battle.

Lookshy does not employ a linear promotion structure. A nitei, for example, may be promoted to whatever rank fits both the Seventh Legion's needs and the nitei's abilities. While vast jumps in the hierarchy are nearly unheard of, they are possible. Bukane Tava Quan, a brilliant soldier and strategist, was promoted from gunchei to shozei for leading her fang to several victories during the recent conflict with Thorns.

Nitei: The lowest rank of the Seventh Legion and the majority of Lookshy's fighting force. Helots and citizens alike begin their service here. Those who do not decide on a military career usually remain at this rank all their lives. Reports to gochei.

Gochei: The rank passes orders from chuzei to the nitei in their fang. The gochei is recognized as the leader and figurehead of a fang. Fangs are often referred to by the name of the gochei. Reports to chuzei.

Haichei: These soldiers are the majority of the Seventh Legion's technicians and hardware specialists. While they may be promoted to shonai, most helots remain at this rank, which is considered equivalent in rank to the gochei.

Sochei: This soldier is the administrative aide for a scale. She manages the distribution of supplies, leave schedules, post delivery, pay distribution and other clerical duties. Reports to chuzei.

Shonai: This enlisted class operates, maintains, administers and manages the Seventh Legion's equipment and support personnel. They are also counted on to offer counsel, advice and solutions to support the command. Reports to chuzei, but is often called upon by officers of higher rank.

Chozei: The lowest officer class, most Dragon-Blooded citizens begin at this rank after graduating from a salon or academy. Their emphasis is on training enlisted personnel. They also manage standards of performance and the professional development of their talon. Reports to chuzei.

Chuzei: Recognized as one of the most difficult positions in the Seventh Legion, chuzei are responsible for all sub-officer activity for a scale or talon. Day-to-day operations for a chuzei are a balancing act between strategy meetings, observing training operations, paper-pushing and problem-solving. Most are masters of delegation and multitasking. Reports to taizei.

Taizei: Taizei command a talon or wing of troops and concentrate on military organization, preparedness, special-

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First Age Artifacts

Lookshy possesses a massive cache of First Age weaponry and other potent artifacts. These items were largely collected by Chumyo Nefvarin in the years following the Contagion, although there is a continuous effort to claim such objects—now exceedingly rare—in modern times. These artifacts are stored throughout the city and in caves beneath the promontory.

Lookshy's arsenal is no secret. First Age weaponry and technologies developed from such items are in constant use by the Seventh Legion. Powerful daiklaves, Essence cannons, sorcerous power armor and other powerful devices accompany nearly every Seventh Legion unit. Even more powerful items, such as starmetal assault chambers, skyships and red jade siege engines are relatively common.

The Seventh Legion also possesses very potent devices that it uses on a last-resort basis, as their effects cannot be predicted with accuracy. The most famous example is the soulbreaker orb, which has not been used since the third Realm invasion. This device is still spoken of with fear among Lookshy's enemies and acts as a reliable deterrent. What its enemies, and most of even Lookshy's population, do not know is that this single-use device has been inoperable since it was used during the third Realm invasion. Certain sorcerer-engineers under memory-controlling sorcery have been at work on rebuilding it for some time, but as it was originally intended to be operated by Solar Exalted, an adequate power source has been difficult to develop. Another device, the terras mortar, fires explosive rounds that multiply in the air and detonate over several square miles, birthing billions of tiny, though deadly, fire elementals than engulf the area, destroying everything.

With a slowly fading understanding of First Age technology and diminishing supplies of spare parts, the fascinating and useful tools, weapons and appliances that made Lookshy both a wonder to behold and a nation not to be trifled with are slowly disappearing from use.

ized training and the suitability and availability of equipment. Reports to shozei.

Shozei: Shozei command a wing or dragon of troops. This officer is responsible for collecting reports from the taizei under her command and ensuring that all units work together, taking disciplinary measures when necessary. Reports to kazei.

Kazei: Kazei command a dragon of troops. This officer reports directly to the taimyo regarding all activities ongoing within his dragon. While a daunting thought, the kazei relies on reports from various underlings and is commonly ignorant of most details. Reports to taimyo.

Taimyo: There are two types of taimyo, field-force commanders (taimyo-yin) and administrative overseers (taimyo-tuva). Taimyo-yin lead the Seventh Legion's various field forces. Taimyo-tuva act as leaders of the Seven Directorates. Traditionally, the two oppose one another in Council, though this is more theatrics than real hostility. Reports to General Staff and the Chumyo.

Chumyo: The leader of the Seventh Legion, the chumyo is the figural power of Lookshy. She is the leader of the General Staff, but never to the point of domination or abuse. The chumyo can be removed by a majority vote of the General Staff, though this has happened only once in Lookshy's history.

Daimyo: A provincial leader appointed by the Shogun. There are as many daimyos as the Shogun wishes, and each possesses as much power as the Shogun wishes him to have. Currently, there are no daimyos in the Seventh Legion.

Shogun: The traditional leader of the Shogunate, appointed by birthright. The Shogun's bloodline was lost during the Contagion, but hope still exists that an heir will someday surface.

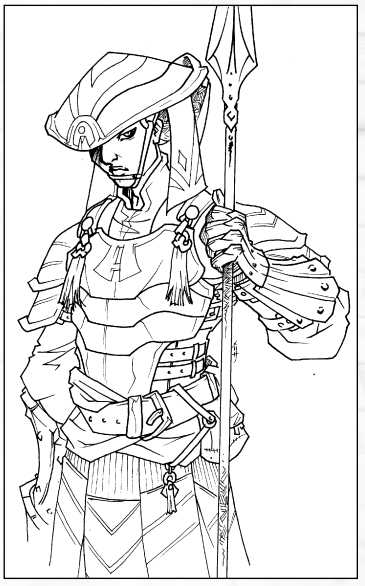
Sazei: A skyship's captain, ranked as a taizei. Each sazei is responsible for the operation of one skyship.

Haizei: A skyship pilot, ranked as a chuzei. At least two haizei are needed to pilot each skyship.

Types of Legionnaire

Several different types of soldiers make up the Seventh Legion.

Second Field Force Heavy Infantry Talon



Description: These men are representative of the Seventh Legion's front-line grunts.
Commanding Officer: Taizei Bukane Tendo
Armor Color: Forest green
Motto: "Ever Resolute!"
General Makeup: 125 heavy infantry armed with slashing swords and shields and wearing normal lamellar armor of fine construction.
Overall Quality: Excellent
Magnitude: 3
Drill: 4
Close Combat Attack: 5 **Close Combat Damage:** 2
Ranged Attack: —
Ranged Damage: —
Endurance: 8 **Might:** 2

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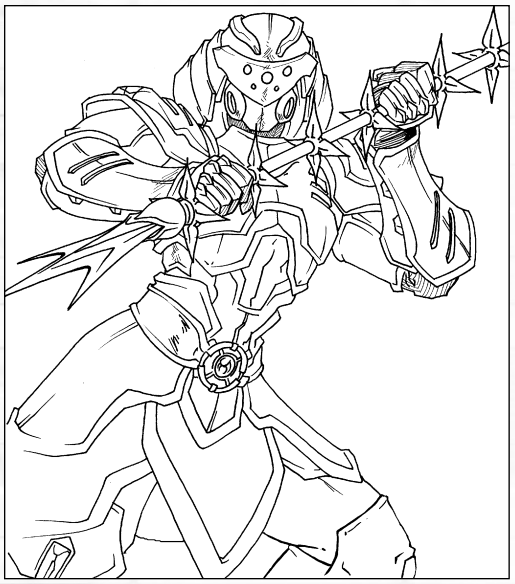
Armor: 4 (-2 mobility penalty) **Valor:** 4
Formation: This particular unit is stationed at the Nasaru Redoubt, though units like it are stationed throughout the Scavenger Lands.

Second Field Force Archer Scale

Description: This is a unit of soldiers specially trained with bows. They also carry short swords and wear lamellar armor.
Commanding Officer: Chuzei Taroketu Shiro
Armor Color: Forest green
Motto: "Ever Resolute!"
General Makeup: 25 archers in lamellar armor armed with strongbows and short swords.
Overall Quality: Excellent.
Magnitude: 2
Drill: 4
Close Combat Attack: 4
Close Combat Damage: 2
Ranged Attack: 4 **Ranged Damage:** 3
Endurance: 8 **Might:** 2 **Armor:** 3 (-2 mobility penalty) **Valor:** 4
Formation: This is one of two archer scales reinforcing Taizei Bukane's heavy infantry talon. This unit is also based at Nasaru Redoubt.

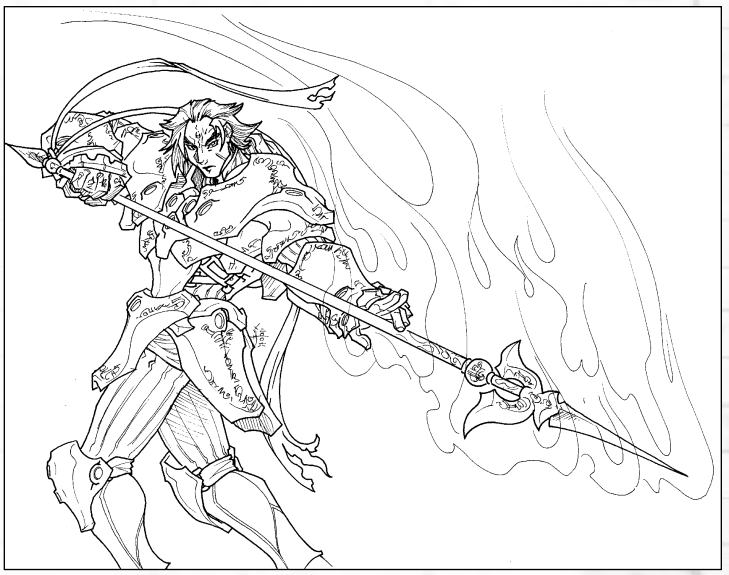
Seventh Legion Ashigaru

Description: Mortal soldiers outfitted with artifacts weapons and armor. In battle they wear specialized armor and carry an array of weapons: fire lances, shock pikes, storm lances, slashing swords and other rare or experimental artifacts. The ashigaru are a military order, reserved for mortals, with strict entrance qualifications and a daunting training regimen. Those accepted are expected to dedicate their lives to military life in general and the science of combat in particular. They are ranked from chuzei and above.



Commanding Officer: Varies
Armor Color: Varies
Motto: Varies
General Makeup: 125 soldiers in ashigaru skirmish armor armed with Essence-powered weaponry and slashing swords.
Overall Quality: Excellent
Magnitude: 3
Drill: 5
Close Combat Attack: 4 Close **Combat Damage:** 3
Ranged Attack: 4 Ranged **Damage:** 4
Endurance: 9 **Might:** 3 **Armor:** 4
Valor**:** 4
Formation: Each Seventh Legion wing contains one talon of ashigaru. Units with large Dragon-Blooded contingents may be reinforced with additional scales.

Seventh Legion Gunzosha



Description: The gunzosha are mortal soldiers who have been ritually and surgically prepared to use gunzosha commando armor. This armor is widely considered to be the strongest in Creation. To enable mortals to use gunzosha armor, aegis-inset amulets are surgically grafted to their bodies, forming attachment points for the combat armor plates, only the bulkiest of which can ever be removed. The life span of a gunzosha soldier is drastically curtailed once the procedure is performed (10-15 years maximum after the procedure), and there is no way to reverse the procedure. Gunzosha cannot be found outside the Seventh Legion, as Lookshy closely guards the secret of the armor's production and the implantation procedures necessary to create these super soldiers. Gunzosha can be of any rank.
Commanding Officer: Varies
Armor Color: Varies
Motto: Varies

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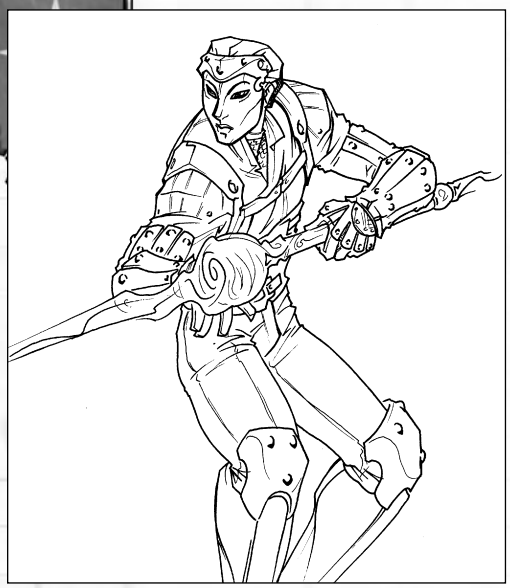
General Makeup: 125 gunzosha commando armored soldiers armed with Essence weapons and great swords or great axes.
Overall Quality: Excellent
Magnitude: 3
Drill: 5
Close Combat Attack: 4 **Close Combat Damage:** 5
Ranged Attack: 4 **Ranged Damage:** 4
Endurance: 10 **Might:** 4 **Armor:** 4
Valor: 4
Formation: One talon of gunzosha accompanies each Seventh Legion dragon.

First Field Force Ranger Fang



Description: As one of the primary special-operation units in the Seventh Legion, these rangers engage in operations that the General Staff would rather keep quiet and that other units would find impossible: assassination, infiltration, reconnaissance, sabotage, rescue. On-duty rangers wear enchanted masks to hide their identity or their presence. While rangers tend to be Dragon-Blooded, there are no membership restrictions. Rangers master a variety of weapons (dependant on mission and personal taste) and wear light, strong armor. Ranked from chuzei and above.
Commanding Officer: Kazei Kiragasa Nico
Armor Color: Black
Motto: "First in."
General Makeup: A five-man fang of lightly armed and armored Dragon-Blooded special operatives.
Overall Quality: Excellent
Magnitude: 1
Drill: 5
Close Combat Attack: 5 **Close Combat Damage:** 3
Ranged Attack: 4 **Ranged Damage:** 3
Endurance: 9 **Might:** 4 **Armor:** 3
Valor: 4
Formation: Operating either singly or in five-man fangs, Lookshy rangers are deployed in operations throughout the Scavenger Lands and beyond.

Seventh Legion Artillerist Talon

Description: Artillerists handle dangerous and sometimes volatile artifact siege equipment such as implosion bows, specialized siege warstriders and haze shields. Ranked haichei and above.
Commanding Officer: Varies
Armor Color: Varies
Motto: Varies
General Makeup: 25 artillery engineers operating artifact siege engines and wearing buff jackets.
Overall Quality: Excellent
Magnitude: 3
Drill: 4
Close Combat Attack: — **Close Combat Damage:** —
Ranged Attack: 3 **Ranged Damage:** 7
Endurance: 6 **Might:** 5 **Armor:** 1
Valor: 2
Formation: One talon of artillerists usually accompanies each Seventh Legion dragon.

Seventh Legion Justicar Scale

Description: Justicars are law-enforcement and military-police personnel, making sure that Lookshy's laws are followed in the city and wherever the Seventh Legion is stationed. The justicars are more rigidly defined as a career path than most other specialized positions, as those accepted are expected to remain in law enforcement. These soldiers have duties detailed in the "Justice Directorate" section of this chapter. Justicars frequently carry enchanted slashing swords (higher-ranking officers carry reaper daiklaves), as well as equipment and instruments useful in the administration of justice. Justicars can be of any rank, and there are no restrictions on who can join, apart from a review of each applicant's military and criminal records (which should be spotless) and the satisfactory completion of mental acuity tests.
Commanding Officer: Varies
Armor Color: Varies

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Motto: Varies
General Makeup: 25 military police in white lamellar armor wielding slashing swords.
Overall Quality: Excellent
Magnitude: 2
Drill: 4
Close Combat Attack: 6 **Close Combat Damage:** 3
Ranged Attack: — **Ranged Damage:** —
Endurance: 9 **Might:** 2 **Armor:** 2 (-2 mobility penalty) **Valor:** 4
Formation: Each dragon of the Seventh Legion contains a scale of justicars.

Seventh Legion Warstrider Fang

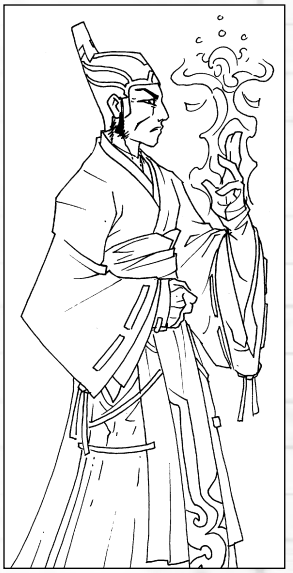
Description: These units are primarily used against siege weapons and other large-scale threats, but they have their place on the conventional battlefield as well. The machines used are widely variable in power and specialization, as are the weapons these units' members choose to employ. Most warstrider pilots are Dragon-Blooded, but there are no specific restrictions.

Commanding Officer: Varies
Armor Color: Varying colors of jade.
Motto: Varies
General Makeup: Five warstriders of varying type with variable weaponry plus a fang of rangers, two scales of ashigaru or gunzosha and up to 10 shugan-junai.
Overall Quality: Good
Magnitude: 1
Drill: 4
Close Combat Attack: 5 **Close Combat Damage:** 7
Ranged Attack: 4 **Ranged Damage:** 4
Endurance: 7 **Might:** 6 **Armor:** 8
Valor: 4
Formation: Each Seventh Legion dragon usually has access to two warstrider fangs and the requisite support personnel.

Wai Tan-Junai (Sorcerer-Engineers)

Description: These officers (chozei and above) invent, maintain and research artifacts and First Age technology. Each dragon has two, with several shugan-junai working under them. These are non-combat personnel. Many senior wai tan-junai are stationed permanently in the city for research purposes (as their genius is too valuable to risk on the battlefield).

Shugan-Junai (Sorcerer-Technician) Scale



Description: Shugan-junai have two functions. First, they assist wai tan-junai in the maintenance of existing artifacts and the enchantment of new ones. Second, they are combat units who provide sorcery combat support. Each talon has one scale, each of which may act as sorcerer special character for an individual fang if necessary.

Organization

Although the Seventh Legion uses the same basic structure as the Realm to organize its forces, or at least the same titles, its field forces are much more diversified. There has been pressure from many sides—even among those who support the return of the Shogunate—to abandon the current structure in favor of one that can accommodate the Seventh Legion's massive numbers and increasing diversity. Such calls for change have fallen on deaf ears thus far, however, or at least those who listen are not quite ready for such a complex undertaking.

Fang: A unit of five soldiers, always of the same type, commanded by a gunchei or gochei.

Scale: A unit of five fangs, frequently of the same type, commanded by a chuzei or sochei.

Talon: A unit of five scales, commanded by a chuzei or taizei. Independent talons usually have one scale of infantry or specialists and one scale of support personnel.

Wing: A unit of five talons, commanded by a taizei or shozei. Wings are usually reinforced with up to a talon of specialists in scale-sized units and a scale of support personnel if operating independently.

Dragon: A unit of two wings, commanded by a shozei or kazei. Usually reinforced with up to three talons of specialists in scale-sized units and one support talon.

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Field Force: A unit of five dragons, commanded by a taimyo. Usually reinforced with a dragon of specialist and reinforcement units, mostly talon-sized, and a dragon of support personnel.

Seventh Legion Field Forces

Casually called "legions," these field forces combined represent the entirety of Lookshy's military forces. All soldiers, regardless of their rank or specialization, receive assignments in one of the field forces, each of which amounts to approximately five dragons of soldiers, though some field forces, such as the foreign legions, expand and contract regularly. Each field force has a purpose or specialty, though they are not strictly governed by their particular strengths (i.e., the First Field Force has a few talons of battlefield units).

The First Field Force

The First Field Force is composed of various special forces, reconnaissance units and highly mobile troops who are called in for specialized tasks. Units from this field force are often used in urban warfare, forest and jungle settings and other close-quarters operations where smaller, faster and more potently armed troops are appropriate. The First also has several units specializing in extreme environments such as deserts, steppes and tundra. Each talon from this field force consists of elite shock troops and reconnaissance units and highly specialized heavy units such as ashigaru. These units are reinforced by warstiders, combat engineers, dragon warriors (the Lookshyan designation for dragon-armored Terrestrial Exalts) and rangers.

The First Field Force is an elite force, with access to powerful and sometimes experimental weaponry and vehicles. Only the most focused, intelligent and highly skilled soldiers are accepted to it. Soldiers from the First Field Force can be stationed anywhere, with established quarters in all of the known and secret redoubts and many other foreign encampments and fortresses in and beyond the River Province.

Taimyo Karal Linwei leads this field force. The General Staff is loath to contract out First Field Force units to other nations except in emergency cases, in service to close allies or in cases where the contracted fee makes the expense worthwhile. Its soldiers wear red armor.

The Second Field Force

This field force is Lookshy's main front-line battlefield unit. It is normally activated only in cases of open war. The rest of the time, its soldiers conduct exercises and war games on the promontory inside the Lookshy Wall. Units from the Second Field Force are often contracted for foreign service as well.

The Second Field Force consists primarily of heavy infantry, archers and a wing's worth of horse skirmishers, It is not a comprehensive force, and it requires special operations reinforcement from the Home Guard. This field force is considered by many to be the backbone of the Seventh Legion. Its soldiers wear forest green armor and conical helms and are led by Taimyo Yushoto Marana.

The Third Field Force

This field force specializes in siege warfare. Having a large supply of heavy weaponry, it is usually the force dispatched to deal with dangerous Wyld creatures and behemoths as well. Due to their large, unwieldy and dangerous equipment, most Third Field Force units are stationed in fortresses on the promontory inside the Lookshy Wall.

This field force consists primarily of heavy infantry and archers with specialized siege-weapon training, reinforced with warstriders and combat engineers. Soldiers wear jade-green armor in battle, but switch to similarly colored jackets for ceremonial purposes. They are led by Taimyo Maheka Lespa.

The Fourth Field Force

Led by the progressive Taimyo Teresu Zen Wu, this field force has become a melting pot of new methods of organization and tactics. As a result, the Fourth Field Force has a large number of small, functionally independent units that excel in non-textbook situations. When not contracted out on unusual missions, units constantly drill in new, experimental techniques and tactics as well as develop novel methods of defeating recognized threats.

Taimyo Teresu considers it advantageous to have all sorts of units on hand to test his battlefield theories and to explore all possibilities for any tactical situation. Soldiers of the Fourth wear silver armor that they polish to a high sheen every morning as a part of their daily exercises. This armor, which is worn in battle and ceremonially, is a source of pride for all of this field force's soldiers. Although this field force has the highest battle casualty rate, it is also a great theater for distinguishing oneself as a soldier in difficult, uncertain situations. For this reason, it also has the highest number of granted citizenships in the Seventh Legion.

The Lookshy Home Guard

Like the First Field Force, the Home Guard has a high concentration of a wide variety of specialists (about half the force). This force mainly serves as a source of specialist units that reinforce other field forces. The soldiers who are not specialists are primarily heavy infantry and archers. This force is officially stationed in the District of Barracks, though most units can be found attached to other field forces.

Taimyo Maheka Varil, the Home Guard's leader, is notoriously militaristic and tries to have as many of his units actively engaged in missions as possible. The Home Guard wears purple armor, with white cloaks added for ceremonial events.

The Legion Reserve

All Seventh Legion soldiers who have served one tour of duty and have not decided on a military career are auto-

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matically enrolled in the reserve, or "the Gray Legion" as it's also known. By last count, the number of Gray legionnaires equals more than six full field forces. The reserve has not been activated in over three centuries, but retired soldiers continue to drill once per week, though the exercises tend to be more devoted to civil engineering and disaster preparation than actual battle training. Some in the General Staff claim that the Gray Legion is unneeded or in dire need of organization, but its commanding officer, Taimyo Taroketo Stonefist, an old soldier of many campaigns himself, adamantly opposes making any significant changes.

The Gray Legion's members usually wear gray, loose-fitting uniforms. Many are mortal helots with important professions and enjoy the respect of the community despite having retired from military service.

The Naval Force

Lookshy's navy functions primarily as troop transport, merchant vessel escort and river patrol. While the Seventh Legion possesses over a dozen First Age vessels in working order (and a further dozen in various states of repair), its naval forces are middling compared to the great navies of Creation. Naval ashigaru, soldiers and sazei make up this force's talons, each one of which are assigned to a pair of ships, called a seabrace. The Naval Force has 75 conventional ships and is commanded by Admiral Sirel Sogrun.

Naval Force seamen wear navy blue armor with small white skullcaps. In ceremony, they wear long, dark blue wool coats over their uniforms.

The Sky Guard

The only functioning fleet of First Age skyships in Creation, the Sky Guard is the pride of Lookshy. Skyships are continually being retired, as their age, their general wear and tear, and the city's limited maintenance capabilities make it difficult to preserve such venerable machines. Because of its equipment's delicacy, the Sky Guard rarely enters combat. Routine assignments include patrolling Lookshy's districts and environs, troop transport and surveillance missions. There are 115 working skyships currently in operation. Each is manned by 15 Sky Guard specialists and supported by 10 ground-crew technicians. Five manned skyships and their support staffs make up a talon.

Because the skyships are few and military operations ongoing, the Sky Guard's services are frequently in demand. Taimyo Nefvarin Shou-Yu leads the Sky Guard. Sky Guard soldiers wear sky-blue armor with small dark-blue skullcaps. In ceremony, they wear long, white wool coats over their uniforms.

The Lookshy Manse Guard

Lookshy's last line of defense, the Manse Guard is a primarily mortal force of well-armed soldiers permanently stationed in the city. This force maintains Lookshy's defensive operations and devices. In times of war, its commander, Taimyo Bukane Winter Rose, has authority over all military operations in the city.

While important, duty in the Manse Guard is not particularly desirable for those who crave battle, and it has been dubbed "the Yellow Guard" by the rank and file. Its soldiers wear black armor and add silver sashes in ceremony.

The Foreign Legions

The Seventh Legion maintains several foreign operations too remote or too politically tenuous to easily accomplish with standard forces. Therefore, fortresses, redoubts and other foreign troop encampments are occupied by troops from the foreign legions. These troops are often former slaves, mercenaries, criminals or refugees from other lands wishing to put the past behind them in exchange for protection from those who would hold them accountable for past deeds (moneylenders, law-enforcement officials, etc…).

When recruited, the new foreign legionnaire is given a new name and modest equipment, then intensively trained in one of the secret redoubts for one year. If she survives the rigorous training program, she graduates into a new life as a janissary legionnaire. More than half quit before the first month has ended. Only 10 percent make it through the program.

Janissaries technically fall under the command of the Second Field Force, but the foreign legion has evolved over the years into a practically separate entity. Most janissaries do not rise above the rank of gochei, and cannot be promoted above taizei. While the foreign legions are under Seventh Legion supervision while stationed in redoubts or while accompanying other field forces, they frequently find themselves "on their honor." No redoubts are manned solely by janissaries, though some minor fortresses are.

Janissaries are granted eight weeks' leave every other year and are given a version of a transit pass granting them free passage through Confederation territory, a right more or less honored depending on the nation. Some journey to Lookshy itself.

The foreign legions wear no standard uniform in battle. They are given refurbished armor and weapons from the various field forces such that the armor is usually multicolored and faded and the weapons well used.

The General Staff

The General Staff is the Seventh Legion's administrative command group, as well as the political engine that controls nearly all aspects of life in Lookshy. It is composed of two groups, the Martial Staff and the Administrative Staff.

The Martial Staff, comprising six senior officers and the Seventh Legion's chumyo, primarily concerns itself with military matters.

The Administrative Staff fluctuates in size, with an average of 23 seats. The chumyo leads the Administrative Staff but cannot dominate it completely.

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Seven directorates support the Seventh Legion and provide for Lookshy's security. Each directorate, led by a taimyo, is responsible for a certain arena of duties, some of which overlap and all of which are necessary for the operation of the Lookshy nation.

The Directorate of the Adjutant General

This directorate is responsible for personnel and their training. As all employment and training of Lookshy's residents is state-sponsored, the Adjutant General's office is a very significant directorate. It manages each resident's education and employment records and calculates aptitudes and strengths, then assigns appropriate responsibilities. A resident's first unit, any specialty military positions and post-military career is all managed by the Adjutant General's office.

Residents may petition the Adjutant General in writing to request an assignment or career change, but the requests must usually be in line with the individuals' education or experience to be granted, though especially resourceful or intelligent residents may be given special consideration.

The Adjutant General's office also manages the housing assignments for all residents. In general, residents are assigned residences in the same district or community as their family by default. Requests for a change of residence are almost always denied, unless the resident can demonstrate a business-related need. Housing is also arranged for metics, new helots and citizens and estranged slaves.

Funerary arrangements are the directorate's final responsibility to a citizen. While morticians from Sijan handle the actual interment, the Adjutant General's office handles all expenses and provides for any of the deceased's disabled dependents in a fitting manner, should there be no family members able to do so.

The Justice Directorate

Law enforcement for the Seventh Legion is in the hands of the Justice Directorate. It has a bad reputation, not for being overly corrupt or severe, but for being, in general, soft on crime. Word on the street is that, as long as you stay out of their way and don't call attention to yourself, the justicars will leave you alone. This is exactly what the Justice Directorate wants.

Minor crimes are often overlooked or closely contained. Arrests don't occur until a situation endangers the populace (notably citizens). As long as a criminal operation is small, justicars usually look the other way.

The justicars also handle many major crimes without resorting to arrest. They often allow known foreign spies to continue operation, for instance, but deliberately surrounded them with Security Directorate agents who feed them false information. Violent major crimes, however, receive serious treatment and swift action.

With a few exceptions, fangs of justicars patrol each district and any place where the Seventh Legion has a presence. Most of their time is spent resolving minor disputes and incarcerating petty criminals. In such cases, judgments are often handed down on the spot, with punishments ranging from minor fines or reduction in pay, to publication in the Black Lists. Black Lists are publicly accessible records of dishonorable deeds and those who perform them, hung in public bath houses and municipal buildings all over Lookshy once per month. In the case of active-duty soldiers, the offenders' commanding officer is notified before any action is taken. For repeat offenders, the Justice Directorate works with the reprobate's shozei to arrange a reduction in rank. Metics receive harsher judgments, as they commit the majority of crimes.

Justicars must investigate more complicated major-crime cases. Investigations require the involvement of a justicar of chuzei rank and a judge, who administers the case and hands

Redoubts

Lookshy maintains six large redoubts in strategic areas throughout the River Province on lands permanently deeded to the Seventh Legion from their respective nations. Each is a combination of fortress, supply depot, command center, skyship landing strip and staging area for the Seventh Legion.

A General Staff-appointed taimyo commands each redoubt, operating semi-independently, as the taimyo makes only one trip to Lookshy per year to report to the General Staff.

Redoubts have been placed in a variety of strategic areas and terrains: on Marukan lands (Marukan Redoubt), at the edge of the Hundred Kingdoms' territory (Nasaru Redoubt), among the southeastern city-states (Nechara Redoubt) and just outside Marin Bay (Marin Bay Redoubt), among other places (at the Storyteller's discretion). The native populations appreciate their presence in direct proportion to the threat level. The Marukani, for example, are glad to have the resources on hand, as they believe it has managed to dissuade the Mask of Winters from invading their lands. Nasaru's neighbor's, however, would more than likely rather see them leave.

In addition to the six publicly known redoubts, four additional redoubts have been built in secret locations. These redoubts are meant to serve as secondary command headquarters for the Seventh Legion should Lookshy and one or more redoubts fall. Their secondary purpose of each is to guard one of Lookshy's Thousand-Forged Dragons (a fifth lies inoperable in the caverns beneath Lookshy Manse).

Redoubts can house from 8,000–10,000 troops, and many have several ambassadorial offices. All are manned by highly trained and well-armed units and have stockpiles of artifact weapons for their use.

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down a verdict once the investigations have been completed. Punishments tend to include heavy fines, imprisonment, caning or, in the worst cases, death by beheading.

Any judgment can be appealed in the appropriate district Court of Justice. Given the practice of summary judgments for minor infractions, few appeal them. Punishments issued for major crimes and capital offenses are often appealed, though verdicts are rarely overturned. In some cases, additional or more severe punishments result.

Soldiers always maintain the right to demand a military tribunal of officers if they so desire before any punishment is carried out by the Justice Directorate. Many prefer to simply handle the matter with as little fuss as possible, however.

Lookshy is a civilization where deeds are primary and words so much air. As a result, threats, slander, libel, even vocal sedition, are not punishable offenses, though very few Lookshyans would ever take advantage of such freedoms. While these things are not illegal, however, they carry certain social ramifications that the populace itself tends to ensure. While reactions to slander are variable, those known to have seditious intentions are watched carefully and usually shunned socially.

Judges cannot hand down exile as a punishment to residents of Lookshy. It is a particular point of Lookshyan pride that they can take care of their own and not force the rest of the world to eat their bad apples. In fact, judges are much more inclined to ban hardened criminals from ever leaving Lookshy. Metics, on the other hand, are routinely banished for major crimes.

Minor crimes include petty theft, dueling, barehanded assault, speaking at Council without leave or right, disregard for public property and trespassing. Major crimes include rape, assault with a weapon, major theft and smuggling. Capital offenses include murder, treason, conspiracy and unsanctioned espionage.

The Security Directorate

Counterintelligence and military security are the provinces of this directorate, which uses rigorous surveillance methods, disinformation and cryptographic security to ensure Lookshy's safety.

The surveillance and registration of foreigners is accomplished by the directorate's Civilian Affairs office and includes the distribution of transit passes and work permits. All foreigners entering Lookshy territory through any of the Lookshy Wall entrances or Port District landings are registered and at least cursorily investigated. Massive files, detailing every individual who has legally entered the city for the last 500 years, are kept in the directorate's headquarters.

This directorate is responsible for the registration and possible confiscation of First Age artifacts coming into the city. The directorate's sorcerer-engineers investigate all confiscated items. If an item is deemed to be safe, it is returned to the owner with a registration permit, which must be kept with the item at all times. Investigators may offer fair sums

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for items deemed worthy of inclusion in Lookshy's stores. First Age weaponry is always of interest, but books, communication devices, vehicles, apparatus that enhance skills and Charms and other items are also routinely purchased at fair prices, such that scavenger lords tend to visit Lookshy regularly. Items considered too dangerous or volatile, such that they may compromise the safety and security of Lookshy are kept in one of many secret storage locations in the tunnels on the promontory. All items of this sort must be reclaimed at the Blue-Green River Gate.

As a further security measure, directorate agents routinely vet foreign legion personnel for spies and saboteurs. Unannounced site-visits of redoubts by agents disguised as Marukan horsemen or Seventh Legion officers are standard practice.

The Stores Directorate

This directorate manages the acquisition, storage and disbursement of all arms, equipment, vehicles and clothing to the soldiery. All requests for new equipment must be made through the central Stores Directorate office.

Under the umbrella of the Stores Directorate can also be found the Arsenal Staff, a government-run firm engaged in the research, design and construction of military artifacts. State sorcerer-engineers design and build new weaponry, while masters of the arsenal are on hand to repair, maintain and store them. The Arsenal Staff also trains soldiers to use created items. All artifacts confiscated by the Security Directive are turned over to the Arsenal Staff. Those that are purchased or kept become state property and are added to the Arsenal Staff's catalogue.

The Store Directorate maintains storage facilities all over Lookshy, though most are kept in the Warehouse and Port Districts. Many artifacts are kept in the Academy of Sorcery, but the most powerful items are stored in the underground network beneath Lookshy Manse.

The Liaison Directorate

This directorate manages all civil concerns in Lookshy and its holdings abroad. It employs examiners—usually older, retired citizens or conscientious objectors of good reputation and family—to manage the day-to-day needs of each district. These are usually life-appointments, unless an individual bungles things to the point of catastrophe. The Liaison Directorate is the least military-affiliated bureau in Lookshy and is considered an acceptable alternative profession for those who object to more war-oriented careers. That said, examiners and their staffs must still be intimately familiar with emergency siege-prep procedures and other military details necessary for district security.

Examiner Superior—Part public-works inspector, part municipal accountant, this official oversees the various examiners inferior. She also manages major repairs and new construction projects throughout the city. The examiner superior employs a staff of 40 administrators.

Examiner Inferior—These officials, one for every district, are responsible for the everyday upkeep of roads, sewers and defense fortifications. They are also responsible for rubbish removal, snow removal, ice breaking and window washing.

Hinterland communities, redoubts and other holdings are treated the same as districts, in that each is assigned its own examiner inferior. Most patron families take responsibility for new construction projects in the hinterland, though all plans must be approved by the Examiner Superior's office. Examiners inferior assigned to foreign redoubts, temporary encampments and other holdings are also trained as negotiators and must interact with local governments to secure provisions and adequate land accommodations, to arrange for passage rights and to settle disagreements between the Seventh Legion and the local citizenry.

The Intelligence Directorate

While the Security Directorate is concerned with keeping Lookshy and the Seventh Legion safe from saboteurs, spies and terrorists, the Intelligence Directorate focuses on the collection and analysis of raw intelligence pertaining to the politics of the wider region and beyond, to foreign troop movements and to the growth of potentially threatening regimes. This directorate employs many spirits, demons and elementals, along with mortal and Dragon-Blooded agents, that act as spies (often posing as merchants or ambassadors), message carriers, inquisitors, contacts, codebreakers, safe-house operators, administrators, recruiters, costumers and trainers. While everyone in Lookshy knows that the Intelligence Directorate exists and what it does, the directorate operates quietly for the most part. Only rarely is the directorate's taimyo seen in public, and she makes only infrequent pronouncements.

The Intelligence Directorate operates listening posts and safe houses throughout the region, many of which are located underground, with others in hidden treetop bungalows or disguised as normal country residences.

The Operations Directorate

This directorate is a planning commission and think tank made up of the Seventh Legion's greatest military strategists. All planned military operations must be approved, if not designed, by this directorate's strategoi. Each wing of soldiers usually employs at least a scale's worth of Operations consultants. The directorate also manages the proper procedures for the delivery of orders through the ranks and develops elaborate war-game scenarios.

Foreign Contracts and Relations

Lookshy provides troops, arms and training to Confederation members. Here are the general policies the nation follows when considering contract proposals.

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Troops and Arms

Lookshy supplies troops and arms to other nations for military campaigns and defensive measures throughout the River Province. This is a heavy burden, but the General Staff does not take this responsibility lightly. Hundreds of requests for aid come from all over the Scavenger Lands every year. Some are dismissed out of hand, some are accepted with ready enthusiasm, but all are considered.

Proposals for aid involving either the invasion of any Scavenger Lands nation or intervention in internal insurrection are never supported. Likewise, dishonest or baldly manipulative ones are treated with scorn. Other proposals can be refused for reasons dependent on the circumstances, as Lookshy will not support lost causes or proposals that will result in a longstanding commitment to hold foreign territories.

Many proposals made to the General Staff are worthy but still cannot be supported for one reason or another (perhaps not enough troops are available or the proposal contains tactical plans that cannot succeed). In these cases, the General Staff frequently works to find an amicable solution. Few legitimate petitioners are sent away with an outright denial.

Officially, Lookshy is politically neutral when considering contract proposals. Even when two parties are vying for Lookshy's support for similar proposals, Lookshy's policy is to accept the first suitable proposal presented. While this usually holds true, political circumstances do unofficially determine these decisions. Parties with more desirable proposals may be allowed to present first by means of arranged delays, last-minute provisions, "lost" post messages, et cetera. Members of the General Staff may be aware that this practice is not exactly fair, but they do not consider it corruption if done for what they believe is the good of all. These individuals understand that Lookshy, being in the best position to aid the region's regimes, owes it to the Confederation and its people to undertake operations that it believes have the greatest chance of success. If they happen to accept contracts with close political allies more than others, that is only because these allies are more worthy, smarter and have better intentions, rather that any sort of nepotistic partiality.

Neutral Negotiators

Lookshy also manages negotiations between regional parties in dispute. These negotiations commonly take place in politically neutral territory, either in one of Lookshy's fortified redoubts or, if no redoubts are close by, a city not associated with the dispute at hand that agrees to the arrangement. Particularly violent disputes are negotiated in Lookshy itself to guarantee the safety of all parties. No foreign troops associated with such disputes are permitted to approach the city beyond the Lookshy Wall.

Some disputes that do not reach the negotiating table in time require intervention to preserve regional security. Negotiators usually resolve such instances before major hostilities erupt, but at times, the Seventh Legion must dispatch peacekeeping forces to prevent regional conflicts or ill-conceived wars with foreign powers. While, of course, no formal contract is binding between Lookshy and the other parties involved, the General Staff is never late in presenting a bill to culpable parties, a bill they are strongly advised to pay.

Training

Lookshy provides military training to River Province nations. While this service is not inexpensive, it is also not available anywhere else, especially given the quality of the resultant soldiers.

Mobile instruction units from one or more of the Seventh Legion's combat units perform most training operations. Large, dedicated areas must be cleared and made ready according to their specifications. These areas closely resemble scaled-down versions of Lookshy's Barracks District.

Some nations send their finest soldiers to Lookshy itself to train in more specialized areas. Many foreign officers can be found in Lookshy undergoing such training.

Training programs are a means for Lookshy to keep tabs on its neighbors' behavior and customs. They also keep Lookshy informed about how every River Province nation has been trained, what their strengths and weaknesses are and how they might be best deployed against an outside aggressor (or defeated if an unavoidable conflict arises).

Better the Demon You Know

The General Staff is loath to enter into, or cause, a situation that is unfamiliar or uncontrollable. Up until now, Lookshy has managed to keep the region stable amid very contentious nations. While many of these nations are not exactly allies, they are at least predictable. Overturning troublesome River Province governments or otherwise seeking to eradicate problematic elements in the region seem like desirable options, but Lookshy has learned its lesson. While such problems exist, they are infinitely preferable to chaos, distrust and uncertainty.

This is not to say that Lookshy will always look the other way when one of the River Province nations gets out of hand. Unmanageable regimes that seriously threaten the region's security or become pariahs to their neighbors are taken care of swiftly.

A Mercenary Economy

Because Lookshy's government is synonymous with its military, military concerns and the economy are more closely related than in other places. In many ways, Lookshy's

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economy and trade policies are just additional weapons in its arsenal. Because Lookshy supplies so many regimes in the region with troops, training and arms, the General Staff can refuse to supply such regimes as a way to pressure them into abandoning corrupt or unappealing policies. While this is not standard procedure—Lookshy does not frequently interfere in the business of other regimes so openly—it is a viable option.

Officially, Lookshy has little formal interest in trade agreements with those outside the Confederation of Rivers, though there are exceptions. Most pacts are one-off deals. Trade treaties are considered to be bad for the business of defense. That said, Lookshy has no formal ban on any sort of trade, except trade with those nations or persons considered hostile to Lookshy.

Existing trade agreements center around a fairly broad agricultural and crafts community. Sheep, quail, cattle and bees are the primary livestock. Various starch roots, tea and oil-bearing seeds and wild barley are the main crops.

Communication

Reliable, fast communication is vital to Lookshy's survival. Military personnel rely on efficient transfer of orders, at times over distances of hundreds of miles. Merchants must be aware of market data and political news impacting business. Clandestine operatives stationed in other cities require secure methods to secretly transfer information to and from their superiors. To these ends, Lookshy has developed many inventive technological, magical and mundane communication systems.

The Seventh Legion and several large Lookshy business concerns use both First Age technologies and various applications of sorcery to send messages of high importance or high sensitivity. Most significantly, the Seventh Legion possesses the Chiang Savi Array, an artifact that can send short, approximately 15-second messages, from the Lookshy Manse to relays hundreds of miles away. This artifact requires a large expenditure of power and effort to operate, however, and the relays are rarely placed in any but the most secure fortresses. The major redoubts all have them, but their placement elsewhere is rare.

Certain sorceries, such as those that enhance Linguistics and Lore Charms, are more common in arranging for long-distance communication. Spirits, elementals and demons also have their uses, but almost never for sensitive communications.

Non-sensitive communications are usually sent via heliograph or by Legion Post. Heliograph communiqués are preferred when the areas of communication are not over a few hundred miles. Although it can be used for longer distances, the equipment becomes unreliable, with a 10 percent chance of failure for every 100 miles distance beyond 200 miles. Heliograph technology is usually used only for everyday communications, but it can be used to transfer sensitive information in a pinch, with the use of fairly secure heliocodes. The Legion Post is slow but very reliable, and it is commonly used in areas not covered by heliograph. The relay system used employs horsemen who switch steeds and exchange messages and packages at way stations every 50 to 100 miles. The Seventh Legion never uses this method for sensitive communications. The Legion Post also operates commercially, with message and package delivery service throughout the Scavenger Lands.

Lookshy's Immaculate Faith

Traditionally, most Lookshyans see official Immaculate Philosophy as a naked tool of the Realm. Even the helots spit upon it. Lookshy's version of the faith is much more private, less dogmatic and not at all evangelical. It depends not on dogma, but on the simple emulation of the Immaculate Dragons. Their faith states that, Exalted or not, people are judged (and rewarded) according to their adherence to the path of righteousness. Honor, Loyalty, Prowess, Compassion and Resolve are the five pillars along the path, and each must be mastered in order to become the Righteous Warrior (the Lookshyan concept of the perfectly wise soldier). Lesser virtues are mentioned as well in the ecumenical lore as well as steps to each pillar. Most Lookshyans believe that their version of Immaculate faith is truer and more faithful to the path followed during the Shogunate era.

Some Lookshyans strive to attain enlightenment through this philosophy, even though they know that the Righteous Warrior is an unattainable ideal. Others follow it to a lesser degree, or not all. Faith such as this is considered a matter of personal choice.

Most Lookshyans do not worship or revere gods any more than they would a great warrior or fearsome, dangerous beast. They refer to beings of worship (whether god, spirit or ancestor) as patrons. Temples, even those dedicated to Lookshy's dead, are less houses of prayer than places where business is transacted. These temples contain no images of their gods, but often display the more impressive treasures offered to the temple's patron. The wealthiest families help preserve their dominance by purchasing miracles and services from certain patrons.

Most Lookshyans consider Tu Yu, the old god of Deheleshen whose massive temple sits in the Old City, to be the prime patron of Lookshy. He lives in his temple and can be seen doddering around the districts, telling stories of the Shogunate. But it is Tu Yu's daughter (though others claim she is his sister, mother or lover—or all four at once), Tien Yu, who is the spirit of Lookshy. She represents Lookshy in Yu-Shan and lives in a golden citadel there. While she seldom involves herself in mortal affairs personally, she has been known to manifest during times of crisis, taking the form of a tall, silver-haired officer in black jade and moonsilver dragon armor.

The Seventh Legion venerates Sunipa, Eastern goddess of war, patron to soldiers and a relation to Shield of a Dif-

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ferent Day (see p. **142**). Sunipa sometimes pays attention to individual soldiers during battle and rewards those who fight economically, using just enough power and skill in besting their enemies as well as those who fight only when it is proper and right to do so. She is pale-skinned, silver-haired and jet-eyed and wears armor forged of impossibly fine steel. She carries Delicate Scarlet Blossom, an ancient fire lance, and a sword of unmelting ice from the Far North. She monitors the conflicts in the East from her Yu-Shan citadel. In Creation, a retinue of automaton warriors known as the Sun Guards accompanies her.

The City of Lookshy

At the edge of the promontory at the mouth of the Yanaze sits Lookshy, a sprawling city of blue stone. Built upon a massive, jade-infused stone masonry foundation, Lookshy is a wonder. Colossal guardian statues of Nefvarin Gilshalos and Tien Yu watch over the Eastern Gate. Huge flood embankments protect the coastal districts to the west. The city's streets are mostly planned, and the majority of them are paved. The widest thoroughfares are 40 feet wide, though many are as narrow as 12 feet.

Housing in Lookshy is standardized, with a dozen or so basic designs. Most have flat-roofs, which are covered with either white cement, for wealthy estates, or bitumen, for poorer homes and tenements. The more spacious dwellings, estates of wealthy families, are laid out around a central courtyard where guests are received, food is prepared and servants do their daily chores. These estates are usually furnished with wells, plumbing, private baths with connections to the public drainage system, glazed windows and wall facings of dressed stone, but present a plain outer façade, as it's deemed uncouth to flaunt wealth. The poorest families live in single-room tenements, with shared toilet facilities, lacking all but the most basic cooking arrangements and natural lighting.

Public buildings come in two breeds. The rebuilt and restored First Age buildings are resplendent structures of alabaster and gold. Newer buildings are fashioned either in respectful homage to Deheleshen architectural styles or in a sort of nouveau-Deheleshen mode, marrying the ancient with tasteful, utilitarian flourishes. Courts of Justice, public baths, sentry-houses and administrative buildings incline toward austere façades, while shop arcades and salon alcazars lean toward more cosmopolitan embellishments.

Embedded Defenses

The River Province region is possibly the most belligerent in Creation. It has been rent by an almost continuous series of dynastic, religious, civil and national conflicts. That said, the defense needs of any one city tend to be concentrated in space and chronologically intermittent—alas, the Seventh Legion has but infrequently been in a position of defending Lookshy from foreign invaders. Lookshy has taken steps, unique in the Scavenger Lands, allowing for maximum defense value should an enemy attack, but also preserving a livable and aesthetically pleasing environment for residents.

The most direct and persistent effects of such embedded fortifications are the negative restrictions they impose on growth and development. City defenses are costly fixed investments that cannot respond easily to urban expansion or, conceivably, contraction. Therefore, expansion, construction and reconstruction of any structures is carefully considered, if

Transit Passes and Access

Residents and visitors use transit passes to enter areas to which they would not normally have access. These passes can be acquired at Security Directorate satellite offices, located in all districts. Each pass bears the carrier's name and the name of the accessible districts. Passes are issued for a variety of different purposes, each a different color. They must be carried at all times during the user's stay in the district in question. Some passes may be granted for a limited amount of time; these fade in color to dull gray over time, marking them as invalid. Due to their very specific enchantments, transit passes are very difficult (difficulty 4) to counterfeit.

Visitors and metics have access to the Fourth Ring and the Lower City. A green visitor's pass is necessary for travel beyond these districts. These passes are valid from one day to one week and are granted as long as the Security Directorate has no reason to suspect foul play.

The Liaison Directorate grants a blue janissary pass to Foreign Legion soldiers every two years. These passes can be used as travel papers to enter the city and function as visitors' passes valid for entrance to any district for up to two weeks (beginning on the date of entry).

Priority transit passes are bright red, allowing the carrier to bypass checkpoints and to skip to the head of queues or waiting lists. Such passes are granted only for very special circumstances with sufficient justification. These passes are carefully accounted for and even more difficult to forge (difficulty 5). Such a pass does not allow its carrier access to any district to which she is not normally permitted.

Silver emergency passes grant access to any district at any time and allow their carriers to skip all checkpoints and queues. These are almost never issued and are almost impossible to forge (difficulty 6).

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not discouraged, by most authorities. Erecting new structures makes the defense difficult by requiring military officials to alter their security strategies along with hosts of administrative and municipal hindrances with which most bureaucrats would rather not contend. The General Staff believes that its defensive plan for Lookshy currently provides the optimum achievable security against any sort of enemy. To alter the layout of the city in any significant way would destabilize defenses by forcing the use of imprecise, unreliable, ad hoc tactics. For this reason, by law, the city of Lookshy and her districts cannot be altered in any significant way without the approval of the General Staff.

The Fourth Ring—"The Foreign Quarter"

Most metics live here, as they are not permitted to journey beyond the Foreign Quarter or the Lower City without a pass. This ring consists largely of metic-run businesses and warehouses, guild houses, marketplaces, apartments, temples and salons.

Fourteen battle towers here buttress the jade-infused porous blue granite outer wall of the city. These towers are always manned with 20–70 Seventh Legion regulars (50 percent of whom will be Dragon-Blooded) armed with both stationary First Age missile weaponry and potent melee weapons. The main gate leading into the District of Trade is always open, except in times of crisis.

Regular patrols of justicars and mercenaries make this quarter safe to travel through, as long as one stays to the main thoroughfares. Thieves, spies and worse lie off the beaten path, in the shadows.

The District of Agriculture—The largest district outside the Old City, the Agricultural District consists mostly of small, meticulously well-maintained fields of vegetables, fruits and herbs, as well as warehouses and granaries. The crops grown here are meant to supplement hinterland production and serve as an emergency source of food in times of siege or some other emergency. The fields are maintained by this district's examiner inferior.

The District of Trade—The first sight of Lookshy for those entering the city by land is of Lookshy's center of land-based commerce, a bustling, mystifying marketplace that never sleeps and where most anything can be purchased for the right price. Four large, open market squares dominate this district. Anyone is free to set up shop here for a small fee.

Many of the streets are lined with shops of all kinds, with barkers standing outside nearly all of them, egging on potential customers. Above these shops are apartments, taverns, burlesque theaters and brothels.

The majority of this district's population comprises metic traders and shop owners and those who cater to them

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by running the district's groceries, teahouses, temples, baths, et cetera. Some non-residents maintain permanent shops and warehouses that open when the vendor arrives, usually bi-annually, with new stock. The Guild maintains a satellite office in this district, as well as a small trade hall and auction house. While the Guild does brisk business in Lookshy, it is by no means the largest business concern in the city or even in this district.

The District of Blades—Bladesmiths, weaponsmiths, armorers and martial instructors of all kinds can be found here. All of the foreign-run salons in the city, and some Lookshy-based ones, can also be found in this district, as well as many informal training halls and freelance instructors.

Security is understandably very tight here. Mercenary scales from the Hexagon patrol this district night and day, supplemented by regular hourly justicar patrols.

The Hexagon—This district houses Pel Kan's Ordinaries, a famed mercenary company allied with Lookshy. Its huge, gated military compound dominates the district. In the winter, the entire company resides here. During the rest of the year, one to three units reside there, along with convalescing warriors, the rare spouse or child and messengers.

Through contract with the Justice Directive, the Ordinaries provide peacekeeping patrols for the Hexagon and the District of Blades. Other trusted mercenary companies may also enter into this contract, especially during the non-winter months when the Ordinaries are away.

The District of Craftsmen—This district houses workshops and warehouses and firms involved in the manufacture of non-martial products such as leather goods, clothing, candles, furniture, vehicles, construction materials and farming equipment. Freelance sorcerer-engineers conversant in First Age technology can be found here, if one looks hard enough, but they are rare.

This district's workers typically dwell here, though some business owners are from wealthy families and dwell with them in the inner city.

The Third Ring—"The Savant Quarter"

Although the third ring is the home to more than just some of the most learned savants in the East, the "savant spirit" is alive in this quarter of schools, invention, and sorcery. This quarter's districts are rife with eager students, famed savants, reclusive philosophers, mad artists, honey-tongued and destitute poets, curmudgeonly sorcerer-engineers, crackpot street-sophists and gregarious epic-peddlers, as well as enough dormitories, teahouses, libraries, amphitheaters, game-lodges and smoke-hookahs to make the streets lively and interesting.

The Green Hunt—This district is a wild space, or as wild as a place can be in the middle of a bustling walled city. Many Lookshyans come here to relax away from the commotion of the city and forget about the worries of the day. At any given time, from 100 to 1,000 people can be found in the district's trails, game fields, feast pits, tree-lodges and zoos. Roughly half of the Green Hunt is deliberately left undeveloped and is technically off limits. The intention is to give young Lookshyans safe places to explore.

Few people live in the Green Hunt. The grounds crews and maintenance staff reside there, as well as a select few minor families with permission to do so. The examiner inferior, Yushoto Cudgel-Arm, an elderly Dragon-Blood, lives in the Green Hunt as well. His estate, the Vined Xavatet, is the restored hunting lodge of the O-Daimyo, who once stalked these woods for game.

The Green Hunt is also a place to honor the dead and war-fallen, with giant victory-plates and triumphal arches erected in unexpected places. Some have been forgotten in overgrown copses, while others stand in prominent, well-landscaped positions. Several tombs, as well, are tucked away in odd corners of the district. These are modest granite structures displaying long memorial homilies of the deceased's great deeds. In places such as these, the ghosts of Lookshy's fallen heroes visit to collect offerings and prayers.

The District of Schools—The city's finest academies and three prominent hospitals are the main attractions of this district, though many are also lured by the fashionable teahouses and shops. Prestigious dojos, salons and training halls abound, though they are very exclusive, and some are open only to well-placed (or highly skilled) residents.

The hospitals in this district are, by many accounts, the finest to be found outside of Great Forks or the Imperial City, thanks to an able staff largely trained in Great Forks.

The District of Artisans—While many artisans ply their trade in the District of Craftsmen, the best make their way here, where expertise is not a rarity and astonishing sights are no further than around the corner. The very best glassworks, jadeworks, ingenious and useful gadgets, furnishings, fabrics, musical instruments, jewelry, ceramics, chattels and tools can be procured here for moderate to exorbitant prices.

The streets of this district have been ornamented over the centuries with some of the finest examples of decorative artistry ever created. Because this district contains some of the city's most valuable items (apart from the city's First Age technology), it is constantly monitored from the air by skyships.

The District of Savants—Those entering these twin districts first notice the smell of the foundries and the warm, sooty air. The factories and millworks here produce pollution and plenty of noise, but also raw materials for use in the construction of Essence-powered weaponry, buildings, ships and machines.

The pollution produced in this district is offset by a sorcerous engine commissioned by the examiner inferior, Maheka Tablu. This engine is located in the district's northern corner, and it prevents any pollution from entering any other district. It does little for the noise, however.

Because of the potential for accidents, this district houses considerably more fire brigades and emergency personnel than other districts.

The Academy of Sorcery—This institution, recently relocated here between the twin Savant Districts before

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the expansion proscriptions, is quiet and frightening at once. A sense of danger is in the air, as all residents know that hazardous experiments and unknown researches are constantly being hatched. This is the place where untested First Age artifacts are brought to be puzzled out and experimental devices tested.

This academy is also home to three fortified warehouses, where artifacts confiscated from scavenger lords and other visitors are stored. Most of these items have been deemed benign but are taken here to give curious sorcerers the opportunity to examine them and divine their secrets. Potentially dangerous artifacts are taken to secret fortified warehouses in the hinterland, far away from Lookshy's populace.

The Second Ring—"The War Quarter"

The streets of the War Quarter are a little bit richer, the lights a little brighter and the level of security leaps and bounds above the Third and Fourth Rings. Most citizens and many helots dwell and make their respective livings here. Most of the buildings date from the time following the Realm wars, while many others, especially residences, are of more recent construction.

Many of Lookshy's administrative offices can be found in the War Quarter's districts, as well as the barracks of the Seventh Legion and the magnificent Deheleshen Lighthouse.

The Port District—This district, the headquarters and home of Lookshy's naval operation, slopes upward to the east, affording sightseers a striking view of the Inland Sea. Lift tubes powered by First Age machinery deliver naval personnel, merchant lords and travelers from the docks 800 feet below to the Sava Heedra Terminal, which also services the few (and expensive) commercial skyship flights. Most naval personnel without notable or wealthy families make their homes here. These homes are typically stucco affairs, with many foreign embellishments, while those of the officer class dwell in blue granite bungalows. Towering high above all is the magnificent Deheleshen Lighthouse, the glimmering spire that is the pride and symbol of Lookshy's naval forces. All naval barracks are also located here; each houses one talon.

The Lookshy Naval Academy is located in the north section of the Port District. Residents are not permitted to leave campus without consent. These people live in bare accommodations: mess hall, spare bath facilities, standard barracks with no privacy, parade- and drill-grounds and administrative buildings.

The eastern section of the district is famed for the fabulous homes of the resident merchant princes. These eccentric palaces host rich, exclusive galas, and their owners produce the dishiest gossip (intentionally or not).

Sava Heedra Terminal is a massive building where all the lift tubes from the Lower City emerge. It also features a small commercial landing strip on the roof. During the First Age, this building was a light rail station, but the rail engines failed around Realm Year 340, and the system fell out of use. Most of the rail in the city was torn out during the last reconstruction.

The Deheleshen Lighthouse is the oldest structure in Lookshy, and no one knows the details of its origins. Thirty stories high and only scalable by the stairs spiraling around its exterior, the free-standing, slowly-tapering shaft houses an Essence-powered lantern that can be seen for leagues in every direction, serving as the region's primary navigational beacon. This unique lantern is a stationary artifact embedded into the jade-infused crystal of the lighthouse and cannot be removed. Some sorcerer-engineers have theorized that it does not produce light on its own; rather, it lures the light from the stars down into its machinations, then issues dense beams of starlight out over the horizon.

The Secretary Admiral, a refugee from the Realm named V'neef Olagar, carries out all administrative functions of the district and is also its examiner inferior.

The Warehouse District—The Warehouse District is primarily used for the storage of exports and dry goods intended for military use. Only two gates, one into the Port District and one into the Barracks District, afford access, with narrow alleys connecting the massive warehouses.

Warehouse workers live in rooms above the central complex of lunch houses, syndicate offices, personnel acquisition agencies and odd shops, though a small percentage dwell in other districts and travel to work en masse in man-propelled wagons.

This district is kept scrupulously clean by the examiner inferior's crack maintenance team.

The District of Barracks—This district houses soldiers stationed in Lookshy. Large barracks, parade grounds, target ranges, training halls and administrative buildings are interspersed with occasional blocks of dining halls and shops.

The barracks here are large enough to sleep one talon each. Most afford no privacy to the soldiers living there, who sleep side to side in moderately comfortable beds. Officers' quarters have private rooms, though some taimyos prefer to stay with their units. Bath facilities are located outside the barracks and are used by all soldiers, regardless of rank.

On-duty soldiers are not permitted to leave the District of Barracks without their commander's permission.

The District of the Legion—Prior to the Contagion, this was the city of Deheleshen's Business District. The military administrative offices here have made the best of fitting themselves into facilities that were never intended for such use. The Operations Directorate, which is based in this district, as well as ancillary offices of every military branch are housed here in faded, once-grand ex-hotels, the backrooms of long-abandoned tobacco-shops and the hovels above neighborhood groceries.

Operations Directorate headquarters can be found in the former Tivi Sava Loan Commission Building (the unmistakable sign still hangs on the building's roof), a washed out yellow and orange building comprising an entire city block.

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The District of Justice—This most heavily guarded district has only one entrance—from the District of the Legion—and is the headquarters of the Justice and Security Directorates and the location of the Nightwatch Citadel, Lookshy's high-security prison facility.

The Justice Directorate headquarters was completed 10 years ago to great acclaim. It is a pyramidal bright-indigo crystal grown out of the earth using what was the last dying gasps of the Overtir Maga, a sentient First Age architectural growth engine, an action that depleted its power in a single use. The building stands 300 feet high, with a 600-foot-wide base.

The Nightwatch Citadel is a domed two-story black and silver building. All its prisoners are kept in locked cells (one man per cell) located in underground cell blocks. Justice Directorate agents in guard towers and fenced checkpoints keep the building under constant surveillance, and skyships always loom overhead. The Citadel is a level-3 Earth-aspected manse whose hearthstone is a stone of judgment.

Residential Areas—Residential accommodations of all types are located in these areas. Mansions, estates and the compounds of the Gentes occupy the majority of the northernmost sectors, while apartments and smaller dwellings tend to be found in the southern areas. The westernmost sector is host to various ambassadorial mansions and commemorative parks, and this sector is under heavy guard and constantly patrolled. The eastern sectors house poorer families, with the northern and southern sections housing richer and poorer residents, respectively, and are patrolled by five scales of justicars each.

The Old City

The Old City has never fallen to an enemy invader. Even the raksha, who devastated the rest of the Deheleshen, could not breach its fortifications. As a result, most of the buildings in the Old City are, with a few minor restorations, just as they were before the Contagion. Most of the buildings, once fortresses and mansions, are now given over to various government agencies for use as administrative offices.

Lookshy Manse—This heavily armored and equipped fortress is both the zenith of Deheleshen military design and a marked departure from the popular trends of the day. Its minarets and spheres stand out as a strikingly discordant design even in the present Age.

Lookshy Manse is a fortress intended to be both a launching point for long-range weapons and a last-stand stronghold and retreat point in case an enemy would somehow breach the Old City. Essence cannons have been carefully camouflaged within the structure's ornamentation, while the walls themselves are jade-fortified steel. Lookshy Manse is a level-5 Earth manse. It is also an entrance to the caverns and the stores of weaponry that lie beneath the city.

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The Aviary—Another intact Deheleshen structure, the Aviary is a towering obelisk with numerous outer platforms and doors running up and down each side. The Sky Guard's skyships berth here, with hundreds of technicians on hand for repairs and maintenance. The lower platforms are reserved as construction zones for new skyships, while the inner structure of the obelisk accommodates offices and repair garages. Several lift tubes provide access to each area. The lowest sub-basement is an entrance to the caverns.

The Aviary has enough space within and without to allow Lookshy's entire fleet to dock. It is a level-5 manse, Air-aspected, and its hearthstone is the gem of the wind's secrets.

The Teocalla of Tu Yu—The Teocalla of Tu Yu is the ceremonial center of Lookshy. It is a massive pyramidal structure housing Tu Yu and his functionaries and guests.

The Lower City

The Lower City sits 500 feel below the Old City on the promontory. The district is protected from the sea by a high, ancient wall and a massive citadel.

This district never sleeps. Workers constantly transfer cargo to points in the Lower City and the Warehouse District. Even when the commercial docks close for the evening, maintenance personnel repair and refit triremes under the light of sunstone lamps.

Few people live in the Lower City on a permanent basis. Most housing is short-term for sailors and their crews, while Lookshy's dockworkers usually live in the city above. As such, the economy in the district is generally restricted to lunch bars, taverns, teahouses, nautical equipment stores and craftsmen devoted to the maritime trades.

Forty-seven lift tubes run from the Lower City to the Port District, with roughly half of these fully functional at any given time. The lifts are Essence-driven elevators, the engines of which are mounted to the retaining wall surrounding the city-section of the promontory. A lift working to full capacity can carry up to seven tons and can be used to carry equipment, machinery, cargo or passengers. The trip lasts between one and 10 minutes (assuming it does not break down, which is by no means rare), depending on the weight of the cargo and the particular lift's state of repair. Most lifts have a cargo chamber of 25 feet by 30 feet, while a dozen or so smaller models exist that can accommodate a dozen or so people. During the hours of peak use, one might wait two to three hours in the queue, while after midnight the wait is significantly less—perhaps one hour. Soldiers and governmental officials of rank may, with ample justification, jump forward or skip the queue altogether. The lift lines are a fact of life in Lookshy. Most accept it with a shrug.

Some residents prefer the system of stairs, ramps and ladders running all along the retaining wall. Anywhere from several dozen to caravans of hundreds of people can always be seen snaking their way up or down the promontory. These stairs, like the tubes, begin at several spots in the Lower City, but all terminate at the Sava Heedra Terminal in the Port District.

Those who do not wish to be seen entering the Upper City may attempt to scale the retaining wall, which is a (Dexterity + Athletics) task, difficulty 4, in good weather.

Port Citadel—The last line of defense between sea invaders and the Upper City, the Port Citadel is an imposing structure, nearly as massive as the Lookshy Manse, built into the blue granite walls of the Lookshy Promontory. Naval forces and talons of soldiers from other units man the Citadel's 17 towers, each one mounted with Essence cannons.

The Port Citadel is a level-3 Water manse, and its hearthstone is a freedom stone.

The Caverns of Lookshy

The Lookshy Promontory is honeycombed with caves and tunnels. Some descend far below sea level, while others extend for miles eastward into the wilderness. The Seventh Legion uses most of these caves for the storage of emergency supplies, foodstuffs, weapons and other caches deemed necessary for an eventual siege. Many First Age weapons, some secret, some unfathomable in power, are stored in caverns far from the city under heavy guard and securely warded.

The passages beneath the city and beyond also provide a means of communication. Couriers familiar with the caverns' twists and turns carry messages between districts. One passage leading eastward extends beyond the Lookshy Wall to a hidden redoubt. Lookout points have been placed throughout the caverns, especially those that run outside the city itself. These outer-city points double as listening stations that monitor the Lookshy Promontory at all times.

Several large chambers function as secret training facilities for Lookshy Special Forces. Some of these chambers contain exact replicas of significant buildings throughout the Scavenger Lands and are used as staging grounds for mock assault in preparation for an invasion, should one become necessary. The largest chamber, deep underground, contains an enormous underground lake where covert naval exercises are staged.

The Hinterland

The hinterlands east of Lookshy to the Lookshy Wall are sparsely settled alluvial plain communities, with managed fields, well-built modular bridges and wide, paved roads. Home Guard regulars are stationed in guardhouses on out of sight side roads, where training fields are also hidden from casual sight.

The land has been developed with a military purpose in mind. Streets are laid out for optimum defensive advantage. Roofs are flat to accommodate lookouts and ambushing soldiers. Drainage and irrigation ditches are made of concrete and can easily be converted into defensive trenches. Even copses of trees are carefully spaced and maintained to provide for optimum defensive use.

Hinterland communities are led by elected elders and their assigned examiner inferior. Each community contains

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a public building, each identical, that functions as a court of justice and permanent town hall. These are 90-foot-square pillared halls made of Lookshy's trademark porous blue granite. Public baths of bitumen-sealed brick grace each as well.

A few farming communities exist in the now dry riverbed where the Ehloze River once flowed. The Ehloze was obliterated by the raksha during the Contagion, and even the work of Lookshy's greatest engineers cannot make water flow there again. Farming communities use river silt as a natural fertilizer. Communities with wealthy patrons possess impressive irrigation and floodwork technology.

Miners of agate, carnelian and blue granite live further east in the furthest and the most heavily garrisoned communities.

The Lookshy Wall

The Lookshy Wall stretches across the promontory, limiting all land access from the East. The wall is 30 feet tall, with heavily fortified guard towers every five miles. The three public gates are continuously monitored and guarded. The three gates are: the Blue-Gray Sea Gate, overlooking the ocean, the Blue-Green River Gate, which looks out over the Yanaze, and the Forest-Green Center Gate, the largest of the gates, which sits midway between the other two. At least four hidden sally gates exist, but their locations are secret (and can be determined by the Storyteller).

The Marukan Alliance

The Marukan Alliance is a loosely knit band of individualists who have eschewed conventional civilization in favor of life in small, fortified ranch compounds (called range towns) of 50–60 people. The Marukani are famous for their ruggedness, for their frank manner and for being master horseman.

While there has been no official census, there are between 600 and 900 such settlements in the region south of Deren's Ford and north of Thorns. These communities contain extensive pasturage for horses, cattle and sheep, as well as fruit and vegetable gardens and fields for the cultivation of grain. One solitary city, Celeren, serves as the administrative center of the nation. Together, these communities form the Marukan Alliance.

The Range Towns

Rivers, forests, savannas, fields of tall grasses and wild grains, even twin fjords, can all be found in Marukan. The rivers are usually fordable and cannot accommodate waterborne vehicles other than rafts or canoes. Hundreds of range towns dot the landscapes.

Range towns are diverse in design, as each is an organic settlement built around specific trade and production needs. Some feature vast fields of cotton or wheat, while others focus on raising cattle. All maintain large stabling facilities and raise, train and trade horses.

Ten to fifteen large, wooden, two-story stables are usually built in a square or hexagon in the middle of the town. Horses graze in the large grassy area in the center. An outer ring of smaller longhouse residences is usually built in a similar fashion 40–50 feet out from the stables, forming a kind of outer wall (all doors face the stables). A single outer reinforced gate keeps out wild animals and brigands. Within, though sometimes outside the walls, one can usually find a general store, which sells everything from plug iron to used books to odd First Age machinery. Each town also has two or three high stone watchtowers and a stable-armory containing Lookshyan swords and firewands.

Some of the southernmost range towns have been reinforced with Lookshy's assistance, in anticipation of an assault from Thorns.

Celeren

Celeren is the only Marukan city. It is located on the edge of the Confederation of Rivers' southern border and is the closest city of reasonable size to Thorns. Celeren was

Lookshy, a Magnitude 4 Dominion
Military: 4 **Government:** 3 **Culture:** 1
Abilities: Awareness 2 (Heliograph +1, Superior Dragon-Blooded Diplomats +2), Bureaucracy 2, Integrity 2 (Steadfast Ideals +2), Investigation 2 (Due Diligence +2), Occult 2 (First Age Weaponry +3), Performance 3 (Rousing Rhetoric +1, Sabre-Rattling +1), Presence 2, Stealth 1 (Sabotage +3), War 4 (Defense +1)
Virtues: Compassion 1, Conviction 3, Temperance 3, Valor 4
Virtue Flaw: Valor **Current Limit:** 3
Willpower: 8
Bonus Points: 20 **External Bonus Points:** 6
Notes: Lookshy's noble families, the Gentes, would make excellent sources for Dragon-Blooded savant and sorcerer characters with Legitimacy. Its bonus points are tied up in the third dot of Performance and Specialties, while its external bonus points — from the Confederation of Rivers — have been spent on the eighth dot of Willpower. The honor, loyalty and pride of Lookshy is legendary, and the idea of failing to fight to defend their own is, in its citizens' eyes, utterly absurd. Its Virtue Flaw causes the city-state never to back down from a battle.

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once used by the Realm as a launching point for its various invasions into the Scavenger Lands. Once the city was liberated by the Seventh Legion, the Marukani took the city apart, stripping it of all Realm embellishments.

When the time came to rebuild Celeren, much was left as it stood. Although new buildings were erected, several areas were simply swept up and earmarked for open-air marketplaces. In one instance, the former site of a complex of mansions once used for imperial administration was simply covered with a great mound of dirt. It is now known as Backson's Hill and is thought to be a prison for the evil ghosts of imperial soldiers killed long ago.

While technically a city by population, few traditional buildings can be found in Celeren. Shops, civic centers, temples and amphitheaters are all open-air affairs that operate rain or shine. The city is walled, but the gates rarely close, as riders are always coming and going.

Most Marukani do not visit Celeren on any regular basis, except for the Spring Market.

Spring Market

The highlight of the year is Spring Market, a celebration of Marukan culture from horse-breeding exhibitions and races to local arts and crafts exhibits and enough singing, dancing and drinking to fill several weeks of revelry. There is a carnival, an annual yearling auction, contests to determine who has grown the largest melon or raised the fattest pig. For a finale, the Marukani put out all of the fires and honor their dead under the light of the stars in a riotous nationwide wake. Wagons are stuffed with the remains and favorite possessions of their honored dead and sent in trains to Sijan, where they are interred in ancestral mausoleums. Heroic and otherwise famous horses receive the same honors.

The Marukani are famous drinkers, but most require a number of days to recover from the Spring Market festivities. Tradition holds that business is generally suspended for 10 days following the celebration, though enterprising folks often use this time to gain a market advantage over neighboring competition.

The People

The Marukani like to do things themselves. They shoe their own horses and build their own houses. They make their own clothes and don't like to take charity, always insisting on giving as much as they get in any business dealings. They also don't use slaves, considering the very practice a black eye on the region's history. Marukani are not scholars, and the few Dragon-Blooded they produce are usually ill suited to sorcery. On the other hand, they are very good with a whip or a firewand. They talk little, eat a lot and curse up a storm if enraged. They are drinkers and brawlers, and they never go anywhere without their horses, their pipes and their cowhide hats.

Marukani are self-starters and pioneers, unafraid to stake their lives on their own freedom and that of their nation. They also love their horses, a tradition that dates back to before the Marukani were united as a nation and existed in virtual servitude under first the Shogunate's imperious daimyos (who constantly warred over the region's fertile farmland) and then the Realm's iron hand. Neighboring nations joke that the Marukani treat their horses better than they treat their own mothers, but it's no joke. There are more statues of beloved, heroic horses in Celeren than of "horselords."

The Marukani believe that a man's word is sacred. To defame someone is a crime, though only punishable by the maligned, who is expected to repay the slight with some appropriate action. In such cases, the law steps aside and allows justice to take its course. If the maligned can subdue her defamer (clan members can help), she is free to take one action that will balance the slight done to her. This is a delicate matter, as some are poor judges of such things. Branding a man for insulting your prize horse is acceptable (though a bit harsh), while whipping someone half to death for overly maligning one's old, rickety wagon is not. (A slap in the face would do fine.) To do nothing after being insulted is to invite scorn, though to react inappropriately is even worse. Overreacting can lead to clan feuds as each family tries to raise the bar higher until either they see reason and just agree to hate one another or the conflict escalates to actual crime (in which case the authorities take over the matter).

The Marukani frown upon slavery. Captives taken in battle are commonly held for ransom and taken on as employees if ransom cannot be paid. These servants are extended certain rights, paid a fair wage, may own property and can eventually buy their own freedom. Under Marukan law, this period of indenture can last only four generations, though most earn their freedom much sooner.

Marukani wear clothes that are well made and durable. Most provincials wear heavy garments such as overalls, chaps and smocks while working, but they trade such clothes in at the first opportunity for comfortable wool garments. Celeren styles range from colored silks and finer wool to soft lambskin. Men and women wear trousers, loose shirts and wide-brimmed hats to keep out the sun. Ornate and sometimes ostentatious clothing is common—even armor tends to be emblazoned with family crests and other ornamentation.

The Marukani eat fast meals of grilled or boiled beef and bread, with some gravy. They don't go in for spices and don't savor their food. Food is considered fuel while on the range. Only during the Spring Market do they indulge in delicious dishes for their own sake (which they do with gusto).

Religion

The Marukani are not overly concerned with the worship of spirits or gods. While they participate in a version of the traditional cult of the dead, few of them consider it a vital part of their daily lives, which are more concerned with

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the state of the land, the speed of their horses and whether invaders will appear over the horizon.

Some spirits extract offerings in exchange for decent weather conditions, but beyond this kind of relationship, the Marukani have little interest in worship.

Most Marukani who do worship a god worship Hiparkes, patron of horses and their riders. This spirit, who often takes the form of a noble gray stallion, watches over horses throughout the region. He favors the Marukani and their friends for the superior treatment and successful breeding of equines. His servants frequent the Spring Market to judge the year's brood.

Clans

Each clan is led by an elder, specifically the oldest living member, who dictates how life is to be lived by all clan members. The wise sayings and salt-of-the-earth manner of the elder set the tone of family business and how family members conduct themselves in public. Elders also settle disputes between clan members and may reproach those who mistreat other members of the clan as they see fit. While most incidents are minor and result in minor punishments, some serious crimes against the family have earned banishment or even hanging.

Most Marukan families see no purpose in fame and fortune, being content to live off the land, protect their own and sell of their surplus. A few, however, have become rich, famous or infamous on account of uncharacteristic ambition, wickedness or simply the wiles of circumstance.

Mayhiros: One of the only significant Dragon-Blooded Marukan families, the Mayhiros are certainly the most powerful. Through a series of perhaps underhanded business deals, the Mayhiros gained control of the Celeren Manse, which they have since made their ancestral home. Some other families take issue with this clan's preeminence, which seems to exclude many other clans from the luxuries the Mayhiros have claimed, but most have no interest in the clan's riches or its closely guarded position as dominators of Marukan politics. In addition, those who have attempted to bring the issue to the Council of Elders have found out the hard way that the Mayhiros do not tolerate meddling in family business.

The Mayhiros are petty dilettantes and bullies, but they are not soft. Some of the greatest Marukan horsemen have been of this clan.

Arbogassu: One of the oldest Marukan clans, the Arbogassu have defined the Marukan way of life for centuries, living off the land, fighting for their nation's freedom and producing fine horses and riders. Considered the ideal, this clan has taken part in many historic events, often heroically. Its members live throughout a number of range towns 40 miles south of Celeren. The Arbogassu have never produced any Dragon-Blooded, and family tradition prohibits marrying outside the family (most marry cousins, but brother-sister marriages are not forbidden). Legend holds that this clan has the ability to communicate with horses (most have Ride 3 or above).

Turrin: The Turrin clan members are scoundrels, interpreting the Marukan ideal as a free pass to take what they want, say what they please and run amok wherever they go. Having long since abandoned their range town (some would call it being evicted), they have roamed from place to place in their busted-up wagon trains, creating havoc across the countryside. Some are imprisoned for various minor crimes, others have long since been hanged, but most have evaded the law thus far.

Horselords

Much of Marukan culture centers around the horse. The economy is based on the sale and care of horses and the training of Confederation horsemen. This requires careful breeding, maintenance of horse-care facilities and scrupulous attention to details such as feed quality and proper horseshoe fit. It is not a life that anyone else would accept, let alone prefer. It is difficult and frustrating and potentially ruinous.

Marukani train their children in horsemanship from a young age. As their lives revolve around the creatures, most aspire to at least proficiency with handling them. The Marukani do not treat their horses as pets or simple beasts of burden, but rather as friends and loyal companions no less beloved than their closest friends and family.

While the Marukani understand that other nations do not see horses as they do (and consider them the poorer for it), they cannot abide those who abuse or misuse horses and will not trust them. "The man who beats his horse would not balk at any betrayal," a popular phrase goes.

Government

The Marukani are governed by a Council of Elders that convenes at the Celeren Manse. The Council is led by the Mayhiros clan elder, who has generously "donated" the facilities so that he can have easy access to all proceedings and whatever elders he would attempt to sway. While the Council concerns itself with many internal legal concerns, its main focus is on foreign diplomacy.

Members of the Council are elected by each range town or rancher collective and serve a maximum of 10 years, though most resign after one to return to the range. Elections occur when one community's elder dies, retires or resigns, resulting in a constant (though at times slow) turnover.

Circuit Riders

The Council employs swift circuit riders to deliver the results of deliberations and other important announcements, disseminating news swiftly to even the most remote range town. Circuit riders are also postmen, border patrol soldiers and, most significantly, the primary law-enforcement agent of the Marukan Alliance.

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Circuit riders are licensed to treat miscreants how they see fit. Few are overly cruel, but most have an intuitive approach to justice, devising imaginative punishments that more often than not perfectly fit the scoundrel's crime. Accused criminals may request a trial by a jury of elders, but circuit riders need not grant one. Most prefer to assign swift sentences before moving on to another town. As such, they only rarely sentence someone to imprisonment, while whippings, brandings, fines and even death, for extreme cases, are common. Crimes internal to one clan are frequently left in the hands of the clan elder to resolve, no matter the severity. While circuit riders are not known to be the most vigilant in pursuing petty criminals, they are famous for driving off invaders, rounding up horse thieves and bringing the odd murderous varmint to justice.

Political Concerns

The Marukani have always had problems with foreign states that wish to conquer them, barbarians who want to slaughter them and steal their horses and spirits who simply do not understand them.

Lookshy: Lookshy is Marukan's greatest ally (and customer). The nation's alliance with Lookshy has led to the greatest windfall in its history. The Marukani rely on Lookshy for arms, training and protection from the Mask of Winters. Lookshy's largest redoubt is in Marukan lands.

Thorns: Celeren is the city closest to Thorns, and this worries the Marukani, who fear the Mask of Winters will set his sights on them. Of particular worry is the fact that the Deathlord has discussed military alliances with many smaller nearby states but has not approached the Marukani.

Nexus: Several Marukan range towns supply horses to the Guild but have little interest in pursuing close relations with a people so diametrically different from themselves. On one recent occasion, the Council of Elders issued a letter of refusal to the Council of Entities, which wished to divert several slave shipments through Murakan lands. Since then, there has been little official contact with Nexus.

Military

While some consider the Marukan Alliance a disorganized society of ranchers ripe for conquest, most of the Marukani's neighbors know that the Marukani possess one of the most skilled and dangerous armies in the Scavenger Lands. In addition, most of their weapons and armor come from Lookshy and are of the highest quality.

Due to the continuing military alliance with Lookshy, several fortresses and at least one redoubt (rumor speaks of a secret one hidden in one of the Murakan forests) have been placed in Marukan territory. Here, Marukani and Lookshyan soldiers train and exchange battle tactics. These points also serve as Lookshyan embassies.

The Marukan armed forces consists of two branches, the Guards and the Cavalry (which include lancers, arrows and hammers). Guards and hammers are the only full-time soldiers. The others are conscripted from the range towns nearest to troubled locations, as the need arises. Local militias, which usually amount to most of a range town's adult population, consist of lancers and arrows, led by one or two full time soldiers who visit periodically.

Guard Scale

Description: Guards are typically heavily armed infantry with light, strong armor, small bucklers, spears and swords. They are primarily used in offensive maneuvers such as frontal assaults and sieges, as well as city defense.
Commanding Officer: Varies
Armor Color: Black and tan
Motto: "For Marukan!"
General Makeup: 25 medium infantrymen in lamellar armor, equipped with spears, chopping swords and bucklers.
Overall Quality: Good
Magnitude: 2
Drill: 3
Close Combat Attack: 3 **Close Combat Damage:** 3
Ranged Attack: — **Ranged Damage:** —
Endurance: 6 **Might:** 0 **Armor:** 2 **Valor:** 3
Formation: Such scales are to be found in outposts throughout the Marukan Alliance.

Lancer Scale

Description: Lancers are highly mobile skirmishers on light, fast horses. They fight saddle-to-foot with swords, maces, morningstars and short spears.
Commanding Officer: Varies
Armor Color: Varies
Motto: None
General Makeup: 25 light cavalrymen in lamellar armor, each armed with a short spear and a backup hand-to-hand weapon.
Overall Quality: Good
Magnitude: 2
Drill: 3
Close Combat Attack: 3

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Close Combat Damage: 2
Ranged Attack: — **Ranged Damage:** —
Endurance: 6 **Might:** 0 **Armor:** 2
Valor: 3
Formation: These horsemen are Marukan locals conscripted to fight off invaders.

Arrows Scale

Description: Arrows are horseborne archers who carry composite bows or firewands.
Commanding Officer: Varies
Armor Color: Varies
Motto: None
General Makeup: 25 archers in lamellar armor, armed with composite bows or firewands.
Overall Quality: Good
Magnitude: 2
Drill: 3
Close Combat Attack: —
Close Combat Damage: —
Ranged Attack: 3 **Ranged Damage:** 2
Endurance: 6 **Might:** 0
Armor: 2 **Valor:** 2
Formation: These archers are Marukan locals conscripted to fight off invaders.

Hammer Scale

Description: Hammers are cataphractoi wearing lamellar armor, armed with maces and lances.
Commanding Officer: Varies
Armor Color: Black and tan
Motto: "Strike!"
General Makeup: 25 professional light cavalrymen in lamellar armor, armed with lances and maces.
Overall Quality: Good
Magnitude: 2
Drill: 4
Close Combat Attack: 3
Close Combat Damage: 5
Ranged Attack: — **Ranged Damage:** —
Endurance: 8 **Might:** 0 **Armor:** 3 **Valor:** 4
Formation: Such scales are to be found in outposts throughout the Marukan Alliance.

The Marukan Alliance, a Magnitude 3 Dominion
Military: 2 **Government:** 1 **Culture:** 3
Abilities: Awareness 3 (Geographic Knowledge +1), Craft 3 (Horse-Related +3), Integrity 2 (Tight-Knit Culture +2), Investigation 1, Performance 2, Presence 2, Stealth 2 (Riding Raids +1), War 3 (Cavalry +3)
Virtues: Compassion 3, Conviction 3, Temperance 2, Valor 2
Virtue Flaw: Conviction **Current Limit:** 3
Willpower: 6
Bonus Points: 15 **External Bonus Points:** 8
Notes: It is likely that savants could come from the leading clans, but as governmental structure and hierarchy in Marukan are loose at best, being a sorcerer is more difficult. The Alliance's bonus points are tied up in one dot of War and the specialties. Lookshy's military support has granted Marukan further military resources (their external bonus points account for the last two dots of Marukan's War score).
The independent, idealistic Marukani love freedom above all else, and their Virtue Flaw demonstrates their unwillingness to bind themselves too closely. In Limit Break, they will not take orders even from their country's leaders unless they coincide with their own desires.

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PARAVEL. I MISSED YOU AT THE FIVE-TAILED FOX FESTIVAL. YOU ASKED ME TO MEET YOU THERE.
WAS THAT TODAY? HOW CARELESS I AM.
CARE TO JOIN ME? I CAN APOLOGIZE MOST SKILLFULLY.
MAYBE LATER... IF YOUR INFORMATION IS WORTHWHILE.
WHAT DO YOU WANT TO KNOW?
TELL ME ABOUT THIS.
INTERESTING... THE AMBIENT ESSENCE REACTS TO IT LIKE STARMETAL, BUT IT'S ORGANIC. COULD THIS BE AN ACTUAL GODSEED?
YES.
A FRIEND. WE'VE BEEN TRYING TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO MAKE IT GROW AGAIN.
WHERE DID YOU GET IT?
INDEED? MY LIBRARY HAS A BOOK ON THAT VERY SUBJECT.
THEN PERHAPS I'LL JOIN YOU AFTER ALL.

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CHAPTER FOUR
THE CITY OF TEMPLES

Called the City of Temples or the House of Festivals by some, known simply as Decadence to others, cited as an example of god-ruled slavery by Immaculates across Creation, cursed by the Deathlords and famous throughout the Scavenger Lands, Great Forks is one of the most prosperous and enlightened cities in the Confederation of Rivers. Known for tolerance, art, culture and learning, but also for revels, drug production, slavery and direct rule by immortal gods, Great Forks is a favorite destination of those looking for a good time—if not necessarily a relaxing one.

The History of Great Forks

Great Forks came into being almost 500 years ago, in RY 278, when three groups of refugees from ongoing regional conflicts arrived simultaneously at the confluence of the Rolling and Yellow Rivers. Each band of refugees had been granted a deed to the land by one of the nations that had laid claim to the area, and each was accompanied by a powerful spirit that had protected the refugees during the journey.

The Three Spirits

The first spirit was Spinner of Glorious Tales, often shortened to Talespinner, who protected a group that had fled from the fallen petty kingdom of Arosh. Arosh had been a prosperous patch of land, watered by the Sandy River and serving as a trading nexus for both the Laris and Velen administrative districts. It was destroyed when they came to war, and the breaking of the dikes at Lowground and Sutter's Marsh flooded the land between them, leaving Arosh and other kingdoms prey to the rising waters and the feuding armies. The few thousand surviving citizens turned to the god they had always known as a patron of travelers and wanderers to lead them, but never truly accepted life on the road. They were among the most desperate of the refugees to settle again.

The second spirit was Weaver of Dreams of Victory, more commonly known as Dreamweaver. It chose its people rather than them choosing it, appearing to them while they were already on the road. The people, the Delathri, had

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come from a group of villages to the east, driven from their homes by the encroaching Wyld, and had seen their god eviscerated and devoured before their eyes by the Fair Folk. Praying and sacrificing on the way to any protective spirit who would spread her aegis over them, they were overjoyed when Dreamweaver appeared to them in their dreams and promised to lead them to safety and to a new and greater home. The Delathri were already accustomed to having multiple local leaders but being guided by a single divinity. Of the refugees, they were the most willing to join with other groups while being ruled by gods.

The third spirit was Shield of a Different Day, called Dayshield by ordinary mortals. Dayshield had led its followers from the beginning; they had come from the north of the Scavenger Lands, from the city of Semaden. Plague had struck the city, and a shadowland began to take root in its graveyards as the bodies of the dead crowded each other. Dayshield saw the futility of the battle against the disease and called on those who were still strong to follow her and gain a new land for their own. Many of those who accepted her leadership were members of the city guard or the army and their families, lending a military order and nature to her group of followers. They would gladly have turned to Lookshy, but Dayshield herself was wary of the city-state's order, fearing she would not receive proper worship if her refugees settled there.

As the three groups readied for battle over the land that they had traveled so long to find, the spirits negotiated. The area where they had met lay north and east of the shadowland now known as Walker's Realm, an area of land where the fragile grass grows through pale bones and no winds trouble the still air. This piece of land, a burial ground where the bodies of Contagion victims were piled in mass graves, was ruled at the time by the Deathlord Princess Magnificent with Lips of Coral and Robes of Black Feathers. The Deathlord was ill-disposed toward her neighbors, which was a major cause of the region's abandonment, and the reason why those neighbors had been so quick to yield an area of fertile land to these wandering refugees.

The spirits knew that a war between their people would leave the victor too weak to withstand an attack from the shadowland. In fact, the act of war and the resulting deaths would only strengthen the Princess Magnificent and give her more troops to swell her armies. The gods also found that they had much in common: All three of them wanted worshipers of a particular sort, ones who could tell stories, who could dream dreams and who could build cities based on visions. Each of them looked at the people who followed the other two. Talespinner heard the stories of heroism and wandering warriors that Dayshield's folk told; Dayshield listened to the lessons of defense and protection that the old among Dreamweaver's folk taught the young; and Dreamweaver saw how Talespinner's refugees shared their stories to create a greater dream they could all enjoy. They agreed to share the lands they all claimed and to make their peoples one.

It was a comparatively simple thing, in the end, to merge the three peoples. They were so glad to have found a home, and not to be facing immediate bloody war, that they were mostly prepared to accept the worship of two more deities and to have to share the lands with the other refugees. (As there were comparatively few of them at the time, and the land was rich and fertile—prime territory, if not for the shadowland to the northeast—it could have been a lot worse.) While a few malcontents objected, and carried their grudges down to later generations, almost all of the refugees accepted the will of their gods and turned their attention to building and settling their new home.

The Deathlord's Flight

Talespinner and Dreamweaver together created a story of a mighty victory over the Princess Magnificent, while Dayshield warded the people and her spirit allies behind wards of invisibility and mists of illusion. The tale that the two spirits created was part dream, part lie and part reality. Spinner of Glorious Tales told of a simple hero who found the secret to the Deathlord's destruction, while Weaver of Dreams of Victory prepared to spread that secret across the Scavenger Lands, so that any child who desired might slay forever the Princess Magnificent with Lips of Coral and Robes of Black Feathers.

Had the Princess Magnificent deigned to notice their work while they were preparing the tale, she might well have been able to halt the spell, but she did not. Instead, she was convinced to go elsewhere under fear of her final demise and was driven away to humble herself before her Neverborn masters. If she harbors any resentment toward the three guardian spirits, she hides it well, lest they conclude their story.

The Raising of Great Forks

With the Deathlord gone, the Three set about creating a city for their people to inhabit. Dayshield laid out fortifications that had risen in the dreams of great generals, while Dreamweaver led all the people in one united dream of a mighty future and Talespinner told stories of previous great cities. The Three also sent word to lesser godlings, God-Bloods, elementals and spirits, bidding them to assist in the task and offering them home and shelter in the future city. Within a year and a day, Great Forks arose from what had been plains and beaches. Within a decade of its founding, the city had grown prosperous and united enough to survive the demise of the three states that had ceded this territory to the three refugee groups.

The growing Great Forks avoided the Realm expedition in RY 301, being far enough south that the imperial troops didn't even come close. Instead, the city affirmed its ties to the Guild, acquired a plentiful supply of slaves to work the fields and built strong links for its export of intoxicants and drugs. (The city's famous vineyards and its qat, marijuana and tobacco fields had already been planted, though were

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far smaller than their modern expanse.) Trade routes were quickly forged between Nexus and Great Forks, and between Great Forks and the rest of the Scavenger Lands. The city also increased its dependence on its supernatural denizens, as spirits from elsewhere in the River Province took advantage of the Three's offer of shelter in return for service. God-Blooded children, as well as those infants who had only a dash of spirit blood, became more common as the years went by, and semi-divine traits grew to be a source of pride in the city rather than grounds for ostracism.

Great Forks similarly managed to avoid the Arczeckh Horde, being far enough north to escape its ravages. The city was a charter member of the Confederation of Rivers, signing the articles in RY 557. While it didn't provide the level of military support that some other states did, it was a source of logistical assistance and medical drugs, together with jade to bankroll operations—always going to great lengths to maintain good relations with its neighbors.

The greatest tragedy to strike Great Forks, and the one from which it is still recovering, was the Battle of Mishaka in RY 754. While the Confederation forces emerged victorious from that battle, the army of Great Forks was wiped out almost to a man. Of the 3,000 Great Forks troops sent to Mishaka, less than 100 returned. The Great Forks military has spent these past several years slowly recovering from that shattering loss, which robbed it of its best troops and its most experienced officers. The military still includes individuals with formidable martial skill and discipline, and on paper, Great Forks once again boasts a sizeable army. The city's forces suffer from weak, inexperienced leadership, however, and the Confederation as a whole knows it. Only a fool would rely on them in a crisis. The current military is barely adequate for enforcing the city-state's borders, so Great Forks must rely on the power of the Three to protect it from external threats. The Three themselves believe it will take at least another decade to rebuild the army into an effective fighting force.

Great Forks Today

Great Forks retains its justified reputation as a festival city, a nexus for temples, a haven for scholars, a home of the God-Blooded and a supplier of drugs. Despite its current military weakness, it is supported by the rest of the Confederation and has firm links with Lookshy. While it has long-standing disagreements with Sijan, their differences are not likely to blossom into war. Indeed, of all the cities of the Scavenger Lands, Great Forks is one of the least likely to be destroyed and burned down and have the grounds sown with salt, simply because it is so potentially profitable and useful to any conqueror.

That isn't to say that everything's perfect in the herb garden, however. The city's army was slaughtered little more than a decade ago, and not only is everyone conscious of the current state of military weakness, they know it could happen again. Subversive murmurs abound about rule by humans rather than by deities and about Realm agents looking for weaknesses to exploit. The Guild hopes to take advantage of the city's lack of army, if only by encouraging dependence on its own mercenaries, while the Deathlord Walker in Darkness maintains his small realm to the southwest and improves his relationships with his living neighbors. Things could get worse very easily indeed, and while Great Forks is still living in a constant festival, the gaiety has the febrile edge of a party that may come to a very abrupt and dangerous stop.

Geography and Structure

Great Forks was built to last, and to accommodate future expansion. Even today, some sections of the city are sparsely populated, despite having been raised centuries ago. Large stores of food, water and weapons are set aside in storage vaults underground, and the city's walls are thick and strong. Great Forks was constructed by refugees who never forgot how to be afraid of hunger and never dared imagine total peace and security.

The city lies at the confluence of the Rolling and Yellow Rivers, situated on the south bank; large docks lie outside the city walls to the south, capable of serving even small warships. The walls are good firm granite sheathed in pale marble, so that the city is not only sturdy but also beautiful. At the center of the city is the Palace of the Three, a domed work of art in opalescent alabaster that houses the Three themselves and their temples, and also contains the Council Hall. The other civic buildings are laid out around it in a grid pattern that was designed by Dreamweaver itself, and that resembles an abstract spider's web, with the spokes allowing clear transit through the city, but the cross-strands tangling and confusing to outsiders.

The main buildings around the Palace of the Three are the House of Functionaries to the north (the nexus of the city's bureaucracy), the House of Soldiers to the southeast (the focus of the city's army), and the House of Learning (the city's university) to the southwest. The area between these three buildings and the Palace itself is normally known as the Temple District and is full of temples for many different gods, cults and godlings—even shrines to the Elemental Dragons and fanes to the Unconquered Sun and to Luna. Scattered around them are small playhouses, fairgrounds, inns, teahouses, parks and pleasances, arenas, gymnasiums, villas, markets, gardens and sorcerous frivolities. Further out live the middle classes, with their private houses, tenement blocks, markets that serve the necessities of daily life rather than the luxuries of the frivolous and so on. On the edges of the city live the poor, in high tenement buildings or low hovels. Every day, they travel toward the center of the city to work as servants and menials or outward into the fields beyond the city, to supervise slaves or to toil at those tasks too complex for slaves but too lowly for wealthier citizens.

In the west quarter of the city lie the tanneries and drying houses, and the buildings that house those more

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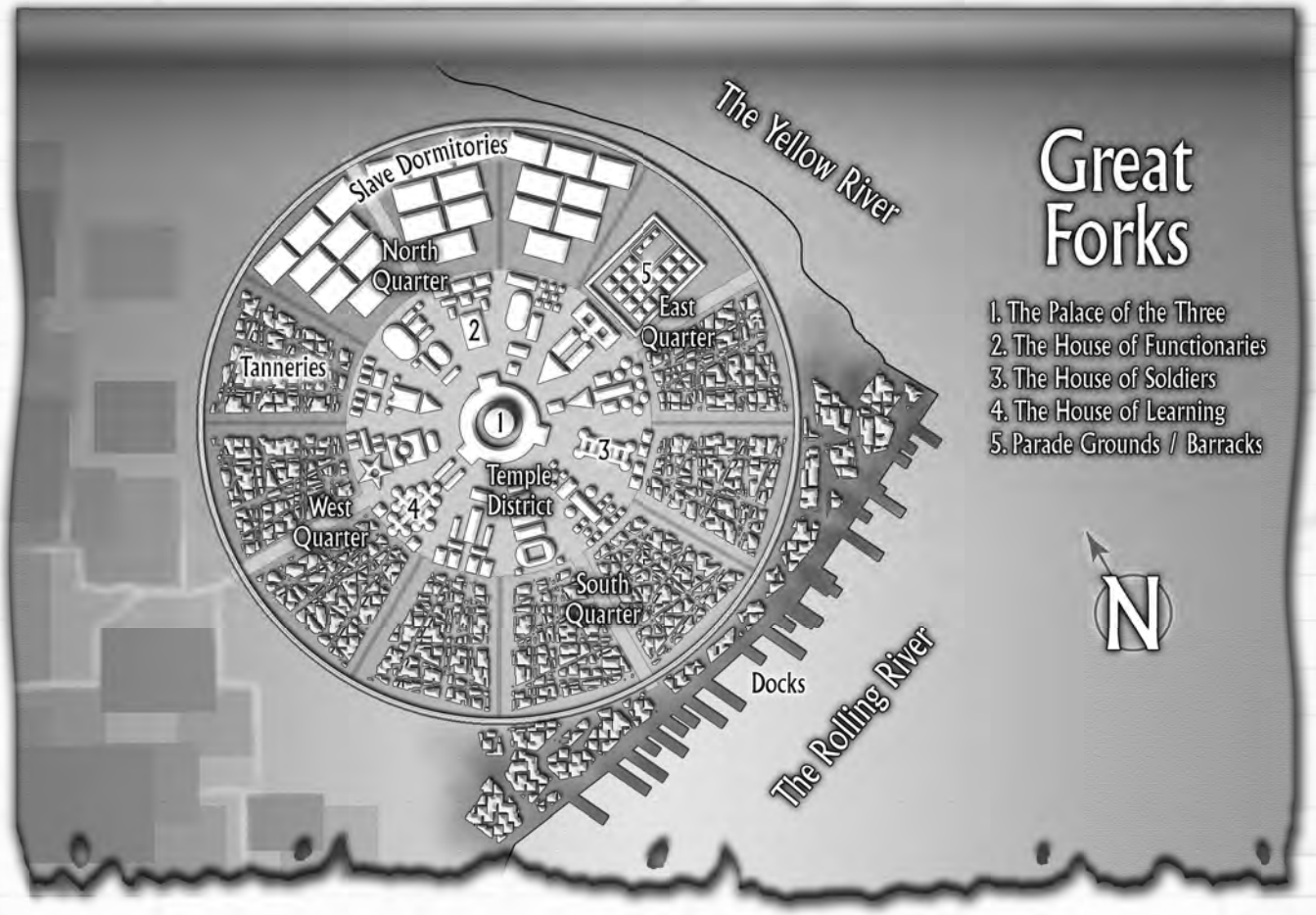

delicate operations where drugs are dried, refined and packaged. Thaumaturges and God-Bloods gifted with powers over the wind see to it that the air in that quarter is blown out of the city, where it will not offend or even harm those nearby. In the eastern quarter are the city's parade grounds and military barracks, where the dust flies up daily from the marching step of soldiers in training as Great Forks strives to rebuild its army. In the south, easily accessible from and to the docks, are the great warehouses where goods are kept for transport and where baled drugs give off an odor so strong that it would set a man dreaming at 100 paces. And to the north are the long barns and dormitories in which the city's slaves are housed, sheltered and fed—and kept drugged and docile so that they will till the city's drug fields day after day.

In a wide arc around the city lies its greatest source of wealth: the drug fields. Watered by gentle rains, soothed by fresh winds, nourished by spells of fertility incanted by some of the city's best sorcerers and tended by slaves, the qat and marijuana and tobacco fields stretch out for acres upon acres. The vineyards and orchards, and the herb gardens that produce more exotic drugs, are tended by paid citizens. These more unusual products could too easily be bruised or damaged by the clumsy hands of slaves. Thrice-daily patrols of soldiers travel out from the city to sweep round the edges of these fields, watching for runaway slaves, enemy incursions and bandits or smugglers. This task is considered a demeaning one and is usually assigned as punishment duty.

The Center

The center of Great Forks is undeniably the most wealthy, gorgeous and exotic part of the city. While it is dominated by the Palace of the Three and the Houses of Functionaries, Soldiers and Learning, it is also full of glorious temples and shrines and embassies, and has playhouses, arenas, gymnasiums, restaurants and brothels that cater to the best and wealthiest citizens and tourists.

The Palace of the Three holds the Council Hall, where the Council of Ministers meets. It also holds a large temple for each of the Three, one at each point of the triangular building (Dreamweaver in the north, Dayshield in the southeast, Talespinner in the southwest). Other rooms include areas for receiving embassies, ballrooms for throwing parties, salons for conducting unofficial meetings with foreign diplomats, chambers for holding war councils, treasuries, storerooms of particularly rare and dangerous drugs, private rooms for the priesthoods of the Three, and so on. Dayshield and Dreamweaver are usually either in their temples or elsewhere in the city, while Talespinner wanders more widely, often leaving Great Forks for extended periods of time.

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The House of Functionaries, to the north, is the main point of the city's bureaucracy. It houses the clerks who keep the city's system of registration and taxes functioning, the paperwork that the system generates (including all tax receipts, wills and marriages), the city's histories and, it is rumored, the city's spies. The Enforcers are based next to the House of Functionaries, and they work together with the clerks as necessary to establish cases of fraud or to identify a criminal. While it is not the most glamorous building in the Temple District, it is a handsome edifice of black and gray marble and is certainly one of the busiest buildings in the area, with people constantly coming and going.

The House of Soldiers, to the southeast, holds the city's military command and records. (The actual parade grounds and training barracks are in the eastern quarter of the city.) These days, it is painfully empty, compared to previous decades. Although General Blood Linnet is working to re-staff the military, competent officers are harder to find than common soldiers, and many rooms in this gold-and-onyx building stand empty and gather dust. A small altar near the entrance celebrates all warlike gods, whether present in Great Forks or elsewhere in Creation, and it is customary for visitors to drop a pinch of incense as they come in. The military records (supplies, registration and pay) are stored in the basement. Many doctors visit here as well as at the House of Learning, to consult on medical care for the armed forces in the field.

The House of Learning, to the southwest, is the city's university and one of the gems in its crown. It is a triumphal construction in rose and gold, shining with all the colors of the dawn, with a dozen domed towers from which astrologers can chart the stars by night. Scholars from across the Scavenger Lands and beyond come here to share their learning. Savants and scavenger lords discuss First Age devices; surgeons and physicians perform life-saving procedures with crafted tools and rare drugs; and historians and theologians chronicle what they know of the past and discuss what they know of the gods. Members of the Immaculate Order are free to visit but are expected to refrain from undue spiritual rigor or accusations of heresy. (In fact, Terrestrial Exalted scholars visit quite frequently and have taken a number of highly important medical and sorcerous advances back to the Realm.) Many savants and scholars vacation in Great Forks, in townhouses subsidized and staffed by the government in exchange for lecturing at the university.

The area around the Temple District contains many luxury establishments but also has a number of discreet, unobtrusive buildings that provide housing for local servants, storage of luxury goods and other necessities that would spoil the general artistic impression if out in public view. They often connect to the tunnels under the city, and to the storage vaults hidden down there. Such buildings are often semi-concealed down side streets or hidden off back alleys, and only a tactless newcomer to the city would refer to them or ask about them. The Enforcers regularly search them to make sure that criminals aren't using them as hideouts or to store stolen goods.

The Temple District

The central area of the city is quite literally packed with temples. On every corner, a new shrine offers ecstasy to its worshipers and material benefits to its devotees. Most temples have adopted the approach of attracting the tourist trade and satisfying the local followers with frequent festivals. Offering basic education and lessons in reading and writing means that they get to indoctrinate the next generation as well, resulting in a well-educated population. While the Palace of the Three is unquestionably the largest temple, many of the others are a quite respectable size, and well decorated, with alabaster, mosaics, lapis and gold, onyx and marble, silks and velvets and incense. The district includes a couple of dozen large temples, 50 or so medium ones and over 100 small shrines barely the size of a house. Some are kept empty on the orders of the Minister of Worship, so that they will be available if new gods come to Three Forks.

From time to time, a religion has a sudden boost in popularity and requires larger quarters. If this happens, it can either present a request to the Minister of Worship, negotiate an exchange of quarters with another temple or buy territory elsewhere in the city and build there. Unfortunately, all the property in the Temple District is already owned by the Three themselves, or by private owners, and no little god wants to resettle outside the Temple District.

The Temple District is always busy, throbbing with city business, festivals, processions, Enforcer patrols, visitors seeing the sights, ambassadors paying their respects, learned scholars, scavenger lords and common worshipers. Even at night, it throbs like a beating heart, and the drums and torches below can rival the stars above. Despite the wide roads, traffic control can be an issue, and wise visitors invest in muscular guards or litter-slaves.

The North Quarter

While the great slave dormitories and housing are the main feature of the north of the city, the general quarter is somewhat less beautiful and glorious than the rest of the city. This is the closest that Great Forks has to a slum quarter: The people who live here, cheek by jowl with the slaves and keen to assert their superiority over them, are the lowest level of the city. This is where the fruit-tenders, street-sweepers, building-washers and other menial workers dwell. The main roads are kept clean and tidy, but the side streets and alleys are dangerous; especially so for rich, helpless tourists.

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This is also where the city's thieves can be found. The embezzlers and racketeers, who are rich, dwell elsewhere, but the pickpockets, the burglars, the assassins, the forgers and the spies for pirates and raiders outside the city can be found in this neighborhood. Old Mother Raiton is the acknowledged person to go to if you need to hire talent for something illegal. She dwells in one of the small blocks of private housing, surrounded by her extended family. Savage Wraith is very much alive, despite his name, but is one of the most famous thieves in the city, and is currently hotly sought after by the Enforcers. He is currently looking for a really challenging theft, such as an excuse to steal something from the Palace of the Three.

The East Quarter

These days, an atmosphere of sorrow and depression often shrouds the east quarter of the city. It has always been the favored place of the military, containing its barracks, its parade grounds and its soldiers' preferred playhouses and inns. These days, with so many of Great Forks' soldiers new to their trade or mourning the loss of old comrades, the quarter has an oddly quiet, fragile air to it.

Another feature of the eastern quarter is the number of healers and surgeons who dwell here. By tradition, visiting scholars with a particular expertise in healing are given vacation lodging in this quarter, but the frequent injuries suffered by soldiers and by those around them were a natural magnet to healers considering where best to place themselves in the city. Glowing Morning Radiance, a healer partly descended from a goddess of the dawn, is one of the best known in the quarter and has inherited altruistic instincts from his divine ancestor, as well as golden skin and hair. Knife Jackal, on the other hand, is a skilled surgeon but a profoundly morose and cynical individual. He frequently visits other cities to compare techniques and is one of the Minister of Research's best spies.

The South Quarter

The south is a reasonably quiet part of the city. Much of it consists of the great warehouses where goods traveling in both directions are stored; this is also the area where the dockhands, the manual laborers, the clerks and similar social grades live. Enforcers and private guards regularly patrol by night, watching for thieves, making it one of the safest parts of the city. Most roads are kept clear and easily traversable, both for the tourists entering the city from the docks and for the trade materials that have to be carried through the streets. Collisions do occur from time to time, however. One of the most notorious, last year, involved a couple of visiting members of House Cynis, a circus retinue and refined opium due to be transported downriver. The resultant midstreet carnival lasted till sunset the next day.

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The Docks

Great Forks' docks are busy all day and most of the evening, all year round. Whether offloading food and luxuries and timber and stone and metal, or loading drugs and wine and tobacco, a constant stream of trade moves in both directions, in and out of the city. Since there are no regulations on the import or export of drugs, there is little in the way of regular customs and excise. Visitors are expected to register "dangerous items of sorcery or other constructs of the First Age," however. Clerks are present at the docks to assist, and there is a guardpost near the city gate. (While nobody will necessarily recognize magical or First Age items, the Three fear the widespread damage such items could cause, so they seek to know if any enter the city.)

Parts of the docks are clearly for trade and heavy loading, while other quays are for passenger ships and important visitors. Fair Folk, God-Blooded, Terrestrial Exalted and normal humans may enter the city freely, unless they are known outlaws. Solar, Lunar and Abyssal Exalted traveling openly will be politely stopped at the gate and then escorted by a detachment of Enforcers directly to the Palace of the Three, for an immediate interview with one of the Three.

The West Quarter

In the city's western quarter lie the buildings that deal with the drying, refining, distilling, mixing and packaging of drugs. This venture is a vitally important part of Great Forks' economy and gets an appropriate share of the city's tax revenues. The raw materials are brought in from the fields to the north, processed here in the west and then transported through the south gate to the docks or elsewhere in the city. Huge warehouses are full of the odor of drying herbs, tobacco, opium and marijuana; vats and winepresses are worked day and night; some drying sheds are kept in absolute darkness and tended only after sundown, so that the light will not touch the herbs within.

The Enforcers in this district are headed by Captain Sword-Betrothed, a middle-aged woman who fled to the city to avoid marriage and swore before the Three that she would marry her own sword before ever taking a man or woman to bed. She is an expert martial artist and a competent officer and is on viciously hostile terms with most of the merchants who own warehouses and distilleries in the district. Their drive to cut costs frequently results in inadequate safety procedures, openings for theft and attempts to defraud taxes, causing that much more work for her.

Government and Order

The Three rule the city by decree and example, but below the Three, a merit-based human bureaucracy runs the city from day to day. This civil service is coordinated by the Council, a group of nine Ministers (with deputies) who serve directly under the Three and who report to them as well as transmitting their orders to the departments below them. The Ministers rise through the ranks on ability but are appointed to their posts by the Three, who can equally well remove them from their positions (and their lives) at a moment's notice.

The first three Ministers are the Minister of the Military, the Minister of Residency and the Minister of Research. These three Ministers fall into Dayshield's sphere of influence and answer to her. The next three are the Minister of Trade, the Minister of Worship and the Minister of Logistics. They serve under Dreamweaver, as much of their work is to do with Dreamweaver's affinities. The remaining three are the Minister of Lore, the Minister of Diplomacy and the Minister of Other Matters, all of whom are responsible to Talespinner. While the Three cooperate, there is always a degree of jockeying for territory between the Ministers—especially in matters where their spheres of authority overlap or where there is an opportunity to increase their own power at the expense of a rival.

The Ministers

The following people are the current Ministers. Some have held their posts for decades (and one even for centuries), while others are comparatively new arrivals. Each of them has a Deputy who is theoretically capable of filling his post if the need arises and who is the logical candidate to become Minister in turn. While there is less backstabbing between Deputies than between Ministers—indeed, quite often Deputies come to mutually beneficial arrangements with an eye on the future—there is a great deal of competition to secure a Deputy's position. Many Deputies have been blackmailed, framed for some crime or lured into breaking the city's laws, so that an ambitious junior can secure their positions. It's impractical to unseat a Minister this way, as they tend to be too powerful and too much in the public eye, but Deputies are more vulnerable.

General Blood Linnet is the Minister of the Military and also overall commander of the army of Great Forks. She has held the post for only six years and is very conscious of her lack of experience. Blood Linnet was one of the few to survive the massacre at Mishaka, being a commander at the time, and has risen since to her position—partly due to the lack of other experienced officers, partly due to genuine talent and devotion on her part. She is a muscular, well-built woman who wears armor habitually, even to Council, and her white hair is cut short to fit under a helmet. Her arms are covered in faded crimson tattoos that date back to the indiscretions of her wild youth. The General is attempting

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to forge closer ties with Lookshy in an attempt to boost the recovery of Great Forks' army, but this action is opposed by the Ministers of Trade and Diplomacy, who don't want Great Forks too indebted to Lookshy. Dayshield is neutral at the moment. The General's Deputy is Colonel Devarth, a stolid, by-the-book type who is paranoid about Deathlord infiltration of the city.

The Minister of Residency, a Terrestrial Exalt named Maheka Aydahj who originally came from Lookshy, has the thankless job of coordinating the city's housing situation. He is required to work with all the other Ministers to provide free housing for scholars, to negotiate temple and cult boundaries, to make sure the slave dormitories stay within their allotted bounds, to handle immigration and to do anything else that relates to physical territory. Aydahj is an agreeable, friendly man, and an excellent communicator. He has held his post for 20 years now and is barely in his 90s. Aydahj rarely moves in high society, preferring to spend time with his family (his wife and their three children) or to enjoy the dramas at various playhouses round the city. The Minister is a short but muscular man, with stone-dark hair and eyes, and still possesses the muscles from Lookshy military training in his youth. He is currently pressing for more funds, as he expects an influx of refugees in the near future if the situation in the Confederation worsens. His Deputy is Marikus Straightarm, a young man of Northern blood who is spying on his superior on behalf of Lookshy and who will threaten and blackmail Aydahj if Lookshy requires it.

Everyone knows that the Minister of Research is in charge of the spy service. Lady Jozakura, the daughter of a human mother and a condor-spirit from the slopes of Mount Metagalapa, watches everything around her with a keen eye and a hunger for secrets. She has held her current position for 50 years now and shows little sign of aging; her skin is still as flawless as white jade, and her long hair as green as fresh grass. Jozakura moves in high society as well as in the bureaucracy, taking reports from agents scattered across Great Forks, and has many friends among the merchant caravans. This is partly due to the fact that her Ministry is willing to provide general (and accurate) information on the trade situation elsewhere, for a modest payment, to the general population, as well as its more secret services to the Three. While many find her mildly disquieting, her falsely approachable attitude generally hides her more vicious side. She is on good terms with all the other Ministers, especially when they want information from her to justify higher budgets. Her Deputy is a scholar and thaumaturge named Second Wing, a dark and sullen young man whose talent for investigation compensates for his lack of tact.

The Minister of Trade, Constantly Smiling, is a spirit of learning and commerce who has held its current post for two centuries. Members of the Guild admire and loathe it simultaneously, as Constantly Smiling handles all negotiations with them, as well as managing other aspects of the bureaucracy that deal with trade, merchants and customs. It manifests as an androgynous young man with a lizard's eyes and tongue. The god always goes robed in rainbow-hued silks and eats sugared larks' feathers as a favored snack. Constantly Smiling works for love of the task rather than for any salary and handles much of its work personally, rather than delegating it to its Deputy. The Minister likes to make a profit for Great Forks and is almost incapable of accepting a deal where it comes off worse, unless doing so leads to a greater gain further down the line. While it favors good trade links with other cities, it does not want Great Forks to be too indebted to any of them, so it often argues against the Ministers of the Military and Diplomacy in Council. Its Deputy, a pretty young socialite named Marble Hands, is a competent administrator who spends a lot of time attending social functions or drug parties while Constantly Smiling gets on with work.

The Minister of Worship, Fountain of Virtue, is responsible for coordinating the demands and needs of the various deities and spirits that make the city their own. Fountain of Virtue is in his late 60s and has held the post for 10 years now, after 20 years as a Deputy to the previous Minister. When arbitrating disputes between little gods over territory or festival dates, he works with utter courtesy yet glacial speed, resulting in many spirits settling matters between themselves just to get the problem sorted out. He is also responsible for recruiting and assigning spirits and petty gods to the city's bureaucracy and services. He has dossiers on almost every spirit in the city and works closely with the Minister of Research. Fountain of Virtue is tall and thin and dresses in rigorous gray linen. He keeps his long white hair and moustaches in neat braids and has a great interest in First Age spirit lore. His Deputy, a vigorous young deal-maker named Pillar of Duty, is actually his nephew. While Pillar of Duty obtained the post through merit, he has endured many veiled accusations of nepotism.

Sari Heartknot is the Minister of Logistics, working with the Ministers of Trade and Residency to make sure that the city's needs in terms of water, food and jade are all met and that the hidden stores beneath the city are kept well supplied. She also has the duty of negotiating with the various spirits of fertility and farming in the area to make sure that Great Forks' harvests are as rich as possible. Unfortunately, she and Fountain of Virtue have never been friendly, which makes both their tasks more difficult. (This is partly due to a highly passionate secret romance when they were both young, which was forbidden by both their families. Each now blames the other for the relationship's failure.) Sari Heartknot is a dignified woman in her 70s who keeps her hair golden with expensive dyes and is never seen without half a dozen rings on her hands. She is an excellent planner and organizer but rather dull in general conversation. Her Deputy, Luthia Redbird, is a middle-aged woman who has clawed her way up from the gutters through hard work, merit and backstabbing, and who plans to advance further, as soon as possible.

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The Minister of Lore is Karreth Doublegift, and his tasks are to watch over the city's university, to encourage prominent scholars and thaumaturges to settle inside the city, and to be alert for any dangerous experiments or personal conflicts that might cause trouble. Karreth is God-Blooded; his mother was a goddess of passionate love and fertility, and his affairs with prominent citizens of both sexes are a constant inspiration to the city's satirists. Outside of his job, he is irresponsible and lighthearted, but while doing his duty, he is extremely charming and incredibly persuasive. He is tall and sinewy, with bronzed skin and dark hair and eyes that sparkle with all the colors of the rainbow. His clothing is usually disarranged, but always stylish. He has had a succession of Deputies who have actually seen to the practicalities and logistics of the job while Karreth charmed all the scholars into agreeing. The current Deputy is Chiming Bells, a hard-working young man who is hopelessly in love with his superior, and who will probably lose his post from overwork and exhaustion within the next couple of years.

Silver Dove is the Minister of Diplomacy. Her department handles formal (and informal) negotiations with other Confederation members and also with outside powers, such as the Realm. She works closely with the Ministers of Trade, the Military and Research. While she is not empowered to make policy without the Three's agreement, she controls the city's diplomats and embassies, and has a wide degree of latitude in interpreting the Three's orders. Silver Dove has spirit blood somewhere in her family tree, as can be seen from her white-irised eyes and the feathers in her eyebrows, but it is too far back for her to be sure of the ancestor. She is in her 70s but still hale, and she attends many social events in order to deal with visiting ambassadors. Of late, she has been studying both Sijan and Thorns, trying to decide if one can be played against the other or if Great Forks should strengthen or weaken its ties with both. Her Deputy, a middle-aged man named Devishen Latoth, has been pursuing his own researches in an attempt to demonstrate his efficiency, and has been consuming increasing amounts of ghost flower tea to talk to local ghosts.

Vandereth Senzak is the Minister of Other Matters, a catchall Ministry that handles everything unexpected, unplanned for and not covered by the portfolios of the other Ministers. Many in the city view it as a symbolic sacrifice for times of trouble. It's a position that can be very powerful in the hands of an ambitious public servant or a sinecure for someone who's willing to sign off all the decrees that the other Ministers suggest. It's also the Ministry that gets all the criticism and penalties if something unexpected goes badly wrong. The previous Minister lost her position over the Mishaka battle, and Vandereth (her Deputy at the time) took her place. Since then, he's done his best to work with the other Ministries rather than try to carve out his own political empire, being more interested in job security than personal power. He is possibly the Minister who is most sincerely concerned for the city's welfare rather than his own interests, because he is aware that he is personally vulnerable if anything goes wrong. Vandereth is a polite and graceful man in his mid-50s, slender and graying at the temples. He is in many ways the perfect party guest, family patriarch and helpful bureaucrat. His Deputy is a young woman named Erika Rednails, who lacks the experience to realize how dangerous the Ministry is and sees it as her personal route to city-spanning power—once she has disposed of her superior.

Life in the City

The average inhabitant of Great Forks is much like that of any other city in the Scavenger Lands. Although Great Forks is commonly regarded as "soft" by the region's other powers, its people still live in the savage Second Age of Man. They enjoy civilized pleasures, education and festivals, but they know violence is never far away. The recent loss of so much of their armed forces has only strengthened this feeling. If anything, an undercurrent of tension pervades the parties and festivals, fed by the knowledge that they are vulnerable.

The people of Great Forks delight in athletics and fitness, as well as in festive dances and feasts thrown by the city's many temples. Their attitude is that the body is to be enjoyed and celebrated. While some abuse their bodies to the snapping point, others find it more appropriate to develop them and enjoy the results. Most citizens don't have to work very hard compared with their counterparts in other states. They earn their livelihoods as part of the city's bureaucracies or in the markets, the university, the leisure industries, managing slave gangs or preparing drugs. The relatively leisurely lifestyle is part of what makes the city's constant festivals and parties possible, and all of it is founded on the backs of slaves.

Most citizens are capable of reading and writing to basic levels in Rivertongue, and a surprisingly high number are respectably literate. This high literacy rate is partly due to the city's status as a center of learning and partly due to the bureaucracy that is a fundamental part of the city's workings. Many temples offer basic training in reading and writing to their worshipers, especially the children. Citizens also tend to have a high tolerance for drugs and alcohol.

Local clothing varies depending on the weather and on particular religious beliefs, but is usually luxurious (not to say decadent) and designed to display an athletic body. Loose robes, open tunics, slit skirts and kilts and tight breeches are all common. While the upper classes favor silk in the summer and furs in the winter, even the lower classes have at least one decent cotton or linen garment for public festivals. Children wear loincloths or simple tunics until the age of nine, at which point they don more adult clothing and start an apprenticeship or formal education or are enrolled in a particular priesthood. While it used to be fashionable to wear military trappings and pseudo-uniforms, these days, after the Mishaka disaster, it is considered improper unless the character can genuinely use his weapons and armor.

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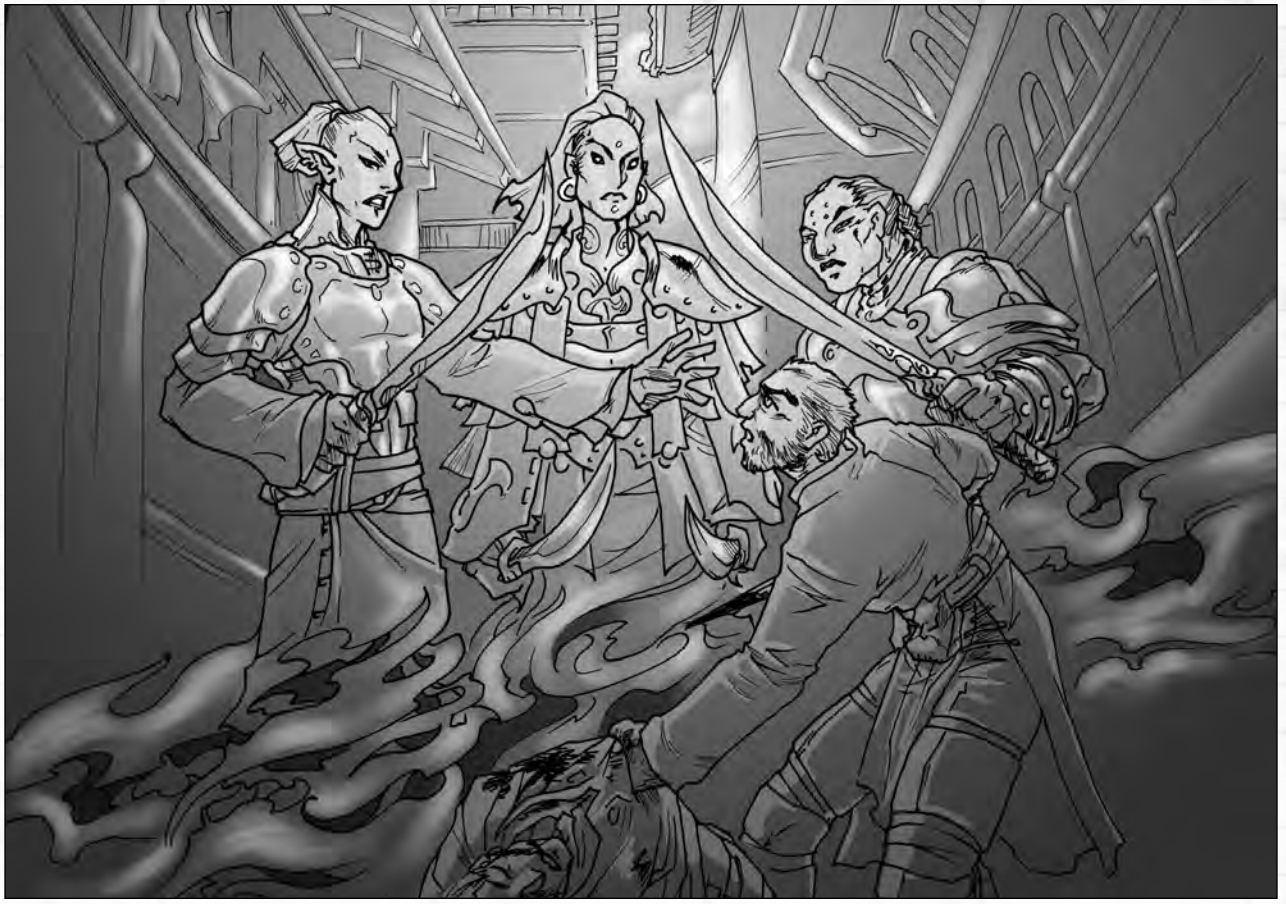

While nobody in Great Forks is actively snobbish about the rest of the Scavenger Lands, visitors are frequently conscious that citizens of Great Forks consider themselves lucky to be living in the city. A man of Great Forks will sincerely and with the best of intentions say that someone from Lookshy or Sijan or Greyfalls isn't to be blamed for parochial beliefs or odd behavior—it's not his fault he wasn't born in Great Forks, after all. While Great Forks is very friendly to visitors, this attitude of gentle sympathy can be occasionally annoying.

Law in Great Forks

Many of Great Forks' law-enforcement officers (known as Enforcers) are spirits or God-Bloods, and the entire department falls under the Minister of Worship. While the Minister of the Military can provide soldiers to back up the Enforcers in the case of widespread riots, doing so requires authorization from the Three or (if they are not available) from a majority vote of the Council. Many Enforcers have Charms or spells that allow them to travel rapidly across the city, meaning they can turn up unexpectedly fast on the scene of a crime. Their actual base is a dour gray marble building next to the House of Functionaries, but they make regular patrols through the city.

Since Great Forks entertains so many tourists—particularly rich, dangerous ones—law enforcement tends toward the "arrest everyone quietly and sort it out discreetly" model. While bloody murder or highway robbery in the streets will prompt loud chases and public arrests, other matters will generally be dealt with unobtrusively and without too much public disturbance. Not only is it better for business, it avoids such events as drunken Terrestrial Exalted objecting violently to their arrest and burning down half the neighborhood.

There are two sorts of offenses: civil and criminal. Civil offenses are such things as failure to pay taxes, destruction of goods, killing of slaves, obstructing the worship of others, and so on. These infractions incur fines. Criminal offenses range from assault to rape to murder, and include the unusual charge, "Assault on another's will," which covers cases such as forcible englamorment by Fair Folk or divine brainwashing by small gods. (Technically, this charge applies only when someone feeds on another's will or steals his worship, which means that Dragon-Blooded and others can get away with the use of Social Charms. If the bureaucracy really wants to level charges against an Exalted visitor, however, this charge could apply.) Criminal charges are punished by fines, maiming or execution, depending on the severity of the crime. The influence of drugs or alcohol is never considered an excuse *unless* it can be proven that the criminal did not take the drugs knowingly or willingly.

Since the multitude of gods and ways of worship has resulted in a multitude of different sorts of marriage and inheritance, the actual law requires registration of all marriages and wills by the bureaucracy, but permits and honors

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any sort of living arrangement. If a dead person leaves no will behind, then his property goes to his oldest living child present; failing that, to his parents; failing that, to any registered partners; failing that, to the city and the Three. All wills are stored at the House of Functionaries under heavy security—though no security is perfect.

Incidentally, it is illegal to publicly compare Great Forks favorably to Yu-Shan. The Three do not want to attract that sort of divine attention, and the inhabitants of Yu-Shan can be notoriously petty about that sort of thing.

Slaves

Great Forks thrives on the slave trade, most frequently buying slaves from the nearby Hundred Kingdoms region. Without slaves, the city's qat, marijuana and tobacco fields would be, at best, half the size they are now. The only part of Great Forks' agriculture that doesn't depend on slaves is the fruit crop, which is tended by paid citizens. Likewise, the city's arenas would be much emptier without slave gladiators, its gymnasiums less attractive without their slave masseurs, its houses of entertainment emptier without the slave courtesans, and so on.

Slaves have many rights in Great Forks. They can own property or marry; they may be subjected to only certain forms of punishment; they may not be cut off from their families. Manumission is possible, at a set price. Slaves are still property, though, and are treated as such by law. Killing a slave is a civil rather than a criminal offense. Whipping and confiscation of money or property are the usual punishments for crimes or misbehavior. An attempt to escape is punished by having all the slave's property confiscated, her marriage (if any) formally ended and the cost of her manumission being set at 10 times what it previously was.

Most of the city's slaves live in the great dormitories in the north of the city or in the smaller buildings around them, in the area referred to as the "Slave Village" by many locals. Those with the money can use it to secure better living conditions, and families are automatically housed together where possible. Many private citizens (such as merchants or farmers) who own slaves arrange for them to be housed with the communal city slaves, paying a small extra fee to the city for the privilege.

Most field slaves receive a daily ration of mete (pronounced meh-teh) leaf, a plant similar to qat that acts as a physical stimulant while dulling the mind and memory. Ingesting mete makes the subject perfectly suited to dull, repetitious tasks that require little concentration or mental ability. An individual who has eaten mete will work meekly all day, stopping only when ordered to and will remember little of the tedium, recalling instead a dull euphoria and waking dreams brought on by the drug.

Medicines and Potions

Drugs, chemicals and philters are part of everyday life in Great Forks. The city's markets abound with sellers of nostrums, euphorics, love potions, herbal tonics, alchemical mixtures, heal-alls, poisons, intoxicants and the components and recipes needed to make them all. Distillations of lotus, poppy and willow are sold for pain, and concoctions decanted from simmering vats of rotting fruit and herbs are used to chase away fevers and chills. Other, stronger medicines and drugs can be found by those who know who and where to ask. Most of the city's denizens recognize that the difference between curing and killing can be merely a matter of dosage and are willing to supply the substance and leave the possibly poisonous administration to the customer.

Not only are drugs a part of daily life in Great Forks, but so is knowledge about them. Every mother knows how to dry willow bark for a febrifuge, or brew maiden tea, or boil up an antiseptic to stop bleeding and clean a wound. Older residents know even more, and the average Great Forks grandmother or grandfather would be accounted a master of the art in other cities. Local authorities are equally knowledgeable in such matters, however, and poisoning deaths rarely go undiagnosed.

The city exports some of the finest wines and cordials in Creation, though local vintners and distillers keep the best in Great Forks for their own consumption. Homegrown qat and mete are popular with slaves, craftsmen, traders and farmers alike. Tobacco and marijuana are also grown in quantity, and while not as good as that raised elsewhere, they are strong and cheap. Small amounts of other drugs and potions are also exported, but at prices so high that few can afford them. True connoisseurs come to Great Forks themselves in order to purchase the substances they need; all the more so if those substances are particularly rare or can be used only for illegal purposes.

Great Forks also has the trade advantage of being directly upriver from Nexus and Lookshy. It is a comparatively easy matter to ship large quantities of drugs and wines straight downriver. While a few cases of thefts have been reported, these incidents were usually on small merchant convoys rather than large Guild shipping. It would take a truly impressive force of raiders to hijack one of the major drug shipments downriver to Nexus. (It would also be difficult to get it past Nexus afterward: It would have to be disguised or split up and smuggled overland.) While some of the trade goes by land rather than water, the majority of shipping takes advantage of the rivers for which the Confederation is named.

Supernatural Denizens

Spirits and elementals make up an important part of Great Forks' population, assisting in everything from military matters to bureaucracy and agriculture. Water elementals coax fish into the city's nets, ifrit guard the Palace of the Three, and wood spirits scout the forests and grasslands that surround the city. These spirits serve the city for the same reasons mortals do: gratitude, obligation, from a sense of place, because it is expected of them or even for payment—though spirits, unlike mortals, are rarely paid in jade.

People with spirit blood are common in Great Forks, and many inhabitants claim descent from a minor godling or greater elemental. Many of these bastard offspring of the little gods exhibit a variety of powers. Though no match for an Exalt, they

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are often physically superior to mortals, and many have magical insight or even the ability to use a few spirit Charms.

Some Fair Folk also live in Great Forks, drawn in numbers to a city so devoted to the expression of passions. The Three generally let the Fair Folk be, as long as they do not hurt anyone (without consent) or attempt to extend their influence among the population.

Celestial Exalted are free to dwell in Great Forks, after an interview with one or all of the Three. For their part, the Three see the Exalted as potentially useful tools or allies, depending on their power level. A weak Celestial Exalt is an asset to be trained, while a powerful Celestial Exalt is an ally to be courted with potential promises of assistance. Abyssal Exalted are dangerous and untrustworthy, but they will be tolerated if bound by oaths and if it was somehow to Great Forks' advantage to do so.

Relationships with Other Cities

Great Forks is on friendly terms with most of the rest of the Confederation. It is particularly close to Lookshy, providing many of the civilian delights and luxuries that military Lookshy cannot offer, and backing the Confederation up with jade and logistics where necessary. The Three all feel that Great Forks' destiny is closely tied to that of Lookshy, so they work to keep the two closely allied.

The only city-state that Great Forks is not on particularly friendly terms with is Sijan. All the worship in Great Forks goes to gods, so there is none left to spare for the dead or for ancestor-spirits. While particularly loved corpses might be shipped to Sijan for funerals, this does not bring the cities any closer together. Great Forks is not actively hostile to Sijan, but the gods living there don't wish to see any of *their* Essence being diverted to the dead. As such, they have no interest in fostering closer ties.

Great Forks distrusts Thorns and the Mask of Winters, like everyone else does. For the moment, it is a reasonable distance away from the Deathlord's territory and can afford to engage in diplomacy. The Mishaka military disaster is still fresh in everyone's memory, though, and Great Forks' inhabitants know they are desperately reliant on Lookshy in the case of outright war. For the moment, Great Forks is walking softly and waiting to see what happens next.

Armed Forces

Great Forks used to have about 3,000 troops, before Mishaka. It now has approximately 2,000 soldiers that can be put on the field, ranging from inexperienced to moderately experienced, with very few actual veterans. While the city can also muster a handful of minor divinities and sorcerers to help with defense, these forces vary according to the season of the year, the climate, current conditions of faith and worship, and the enemy that Great Forks is currently fighting.

Great Forks Irregulars

Description: The city's main unit of armed forces. Before Mishaka, it was of Excellent to Elite quality; now it's merely Fair. It currently consists of approximately 2,000 soldiers, 2/3 male to 1/3 female. All carry chopping swords and a couple of doses of alchemical potions that can restore four health levels. They wear reinforced buff jackets and carry target shields.
Commanding Officer: Colonel Gold Banner
Armor Color: Brown with scarlet sleeves
Motto: "Under the day's shield!"
General Makeup: Light infantry
Overall Quality: Fair
Magnitude: 7
Drill: 2
Close Combat Attack: 3 **Close Combat Damage:** 3
Endurance: 5 **Might:** 2 **Armor:** 1 (-2 mobility penalty) **Morale:** 2
Formation: The army is based in the barracks in the east quarter of the city. At any given time, however, the equivalent of one dragon is patrolling the countryside.

City Archers

Description: An unit of archers, with both self bows and longbows. Before Mishaka, it was of Excellent to Elite quality. Again, it is now merely Fair. It currently consists of approximately 400 soldiers (previously 1,000), 1/2 male, 1/2 female. Many carry thaumaturgical talismans to boost their aim and improve their accuracy. They wear reinforced buff jackets.
Commanding Officer: Colonel Millenus
Armor Color: Scarlet with black sleeves and helms
Motto: "Trueshot!"
General Makeup: Archers
Overall Quality: Fair
Magnitude: 5
Drill: 2
Ranged Attack Rating: 2 **Ranged Attack Damage:** 3
Endurance: 4 **Might:** 2 **Armor:** 1 (-1 mobility penalty) **Morale:** 2
Formation: These archers are housed in the soldiers' barracks in the east quarter of the city.

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Great Forks, a Magnitude 3 Dominion
Military: 1 **Government:** 2 **Culture:** 3
Abilities: Awareness 1 (Superior Diplomats +3), Bureaucracy 2 (Red Tape +1), Craft 3 (The Arts +1, Universities +2), Integrity 1, Investigation 1, Occult 3 (Supernatural Etiquette +3), Performance 3 (Festivals +2), Presence 2, Stealth 0 (Spies +3), War 1
Virtues: Compassion 4, Conviction 3, Temperance 1, Valor 2
Virtue Flaw: Compassion **Current Limit:** 7
Willpower: 7
Bonus Points: 15 **External Bonus Points:** 8
Notes: In case it wasn't obvious, Talespinner, Dayshield and Dreamweaver are all sorcerers with Legitimacy. If more were to be needed for some reason, they could be drawn from the Ministers; moreover, the many powerful supernatural beings in Great Forks might make for some interesting and surprising savants. Because of the sad state of its own military, Great Forks' entire War score is accounted for by external bonus points, while trade agreements and general cultural power give it a third dot of Performance from external bonus points as well. The dominion's own bonus points are entirely invested in specialties.
Great Forks' population loves to lose itself in aesthetics, pleasure and philosophy. With irresponsible, joyous abandon, they will refuse to take anything seriously or focus on important issues when in Limit Break.

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YOU REEK OF LIVING WARMTH, SIR, YET I DIDN'T NOTE YOUR APPROACH. WELL DONE.
SAVE IT. YOU'RE TYPHON, RIGHT? THE MASK OF WINTERS' REPRESENTATIVE TO THE COUNCIL?
ALAS, YES.
I DIDN'T BRING YOU HERE TO DESTROY YOU, DEATHKNIGHT,BUT I MAY YET. NO TRICKS.
HOW GENEROUS. TO WHAT DO I OWE THE HONOR?
I HAVE TO TALK TO YOUR DEATHLORD MASTER. I'D RATHER DO SO WITH A PROPER INTRODUCTION.
VERY WISE. THINKING OF CONVERTING?
HARDLY. BUT I DO NEED HIM. THE GREEN LADY SAYS HE'S THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN HELP ME.
THE GREEN LADY? HM...
FOLLOW ME.

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CHAPTER FIVE
EMPIRE OF THE DEAD

Upon the southern shores of the Scavenger Lands, dark waves lap at bone-white cliffs, and a faded sun sets upon one of the great cities of Creation. Pale rays creep across the darkened bay and paint looming, black marble edifices in hues of silver and gray, casting long shadows across a slowly decaying city. Wide boulevards ring with iron-shod footfalls as silent, unliving soldiers slowly parade beneath the dead flowers that cling to black-timber arches. The wind sweeps along quiet streets, lifting stray leaves and carrying with it a heavy stench of rot and decay. Within hollowed-out ruins and empty-eyed houses, flashes of color appear and vanish as bright-eyed residents peek from their homes, the rustle of their furtive conversations, the scent of their cooking food and the slow beat of their still-living hearts subtly reminding the city that it too once lived. In the grandest square, beneath the towering walls of governmental palaces, a black-iron statue of a dictator raises falsely benevolent hands to support croaking rations, his smiling mask looking with pleasure upon his conquest.

Once, this city rivaled Lookshy's prestige and Nexus's might. It stood just beyond the simplistic barbarism of the Scavenger Lands and remembered its place in the Shogunate. When other nations turned their backs upon the Realm, it honored its debts and offered up tribute to the Scarlet Empire. As a reward for its civility and sophistication, it became a center for skilled artisans, thoughtful intellectuals and honorable warriors, and each lifted their hands to make their city beautiful. Their might grew so great that the city, with its Dynastic allies, threatened the Scavenger Lands itself with the greatest war in the city's living memory. But with power came pride, and the city's hubris made it vulnerable at a crucial moment. Almost literally overnight, the dead rose up to swallow the city in an apocalyptic storm of pain and horror. When a mountain of rotten flesh stopped at the city gates, it brought with it a new ruler, and the rest of Creation turned a blind eye. None speak the city's name now, and it lies only upon the pages of scholarly tomes.

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But Thorns is not dead. Although Creation has forgotten it, it has not forgotten Creation. Most shadowlands in Creation have existed for some time or formed slowly over the course of a tragic war or the spread of a plague, but a shadowland blossomed in Thorns in a matter of days, and only recently. The dead march through its streets and pull at the strings of its Puppet King, but the living still huddle and hide in the ruins of their once great city. They whisper to their children tales of the warm, golden rays of an unfiltered sun, they trade stories with one another of bygone glories, and they remember a time when the people of the city smiled and laughed. Many have fallen into the gray despair of the dead that surround them, submitting to the Mask of Winters' rule, but a few hearts still beat with the pride that once made Thorns great. These few struggle quietly to find a way to free their city while their brothers and sisters slave in industrial pits or behind bureaucratic desks. They hope against hope that some hero will remember their city and their plight, and that a hand will reach out for Thorns before it drowns completely in the miasma of the Underworld.

The Thorns that Was

During its height, Thorns was one of the greater cities of Creation. Where Nexus had its wealth, Lookshy its military strength and Great Forks its decadent appeal, Thorns flowed with sophistication and cultural achievements. The people of Thorns valued excellence above all things, and they struggled for perfection in whatever occupation they chose, often competing fiercely with one another. While the blades of Thorns might not have had the fine quality of a Lookshy sword or the quantity of rapidly produced Nexus weaponry, the filigreed hilt and elegantly etched blade made by a master craftsman from Thorns invariably took a buyer's breath away.

The people of the city also valued beauty, for excellence was nothing without style. Sweeping architecture decorated the skyline, garlands of white flowers hung from timber archways over the city's wide boulevards, and the lush trees of the parks and the rich herb gardens hanging from the windows of the homes of the wealthy gave Thorns a pleasing fragrance. Thorns valued the cultural arts, and fine paintings lined the walls of wealthier residences, and even the poor had a hanging or two in their hovels, even if it was a simple, homemade quilt. Musicians sang on street corners, poets wept flowery words in restaurants, and orators boomed out their philosophies in well-appointed theaters. Tailors lavished the courtiers of the Autocrat's palace with richly colored silks and lace, and the courtiers themselves added more color and style to the courts with a secretive language of emotion and intent expressed entirely through the use of decorative fans. Thorns' passion for personal excellence made for poor soldiers but fine warriors, and the often-romanticized duelists of Thorns fought highly stylized battles to redeem a comrade's stained honor or to catch the eye of a disputed lover.

Thorns often cast a wistful eye to the past, especially to the Shogunate Era, and disdained the inhabitants of many of the surrounding nations as barbarians. Its people saw the Realm as the true heir to the glories of the First Age, eagerly submitting to the Scarlet Empress's demands for tribute. Indeed, they saw the Realm as a valued ally rather than a dangerous, imperial power. The folk of the city showered visiting Dynasts with attention and artistic endeavor in an attempt to impress them, and satraps received open-armed welcomes. The Immaculate Order achieved high popularity, and several temples lay scattered through the city.

The Empress's blatant machinations of their succession in the twilight years of the city's history gave the citizens pause, but few spoke out against it. The shift in the city's industry from the arts of culture to the arts of war troubled a few more, but most swallowed their complaints. Indeed, the new Autocrat promised glory as Thorns asserted itself as a rightful ruler of the Scavenger Lands, bringing civilization to lands that knew only barbarism. His repeated defeats first infuriated the people of Thorns and then disillusioned them. The winds of change swept through the city well before the Mask of Winters crushed it, and left to its own devices, Thorns would not have continued the path it was on. But such speculation is immaterial, for the Mask of Winters grasped the city in his fist and wiped it from the map of Creation.

The Thorns that Is

Thorns' legacy is gone, washed away in a wave of undead flesh and ghostly ambition. The memory of Thorns' fall stands stark in the hearts and minds of its living residents, for it was a nightmare made real. Necromancy tore the sky open, and droplets of blood and bone rained upon the citizenry. An impossibly massive hand rose and shook the ground with the force of its descent, its tattered flesh exposing bony claws that dug furrows into the earth as it dragged a titanic form forward into the light of the moon. A nauseating wave of shambling corpses swept forth, and the people cried out for protection. Twenty Dragon-Blooded warriors, each more glorious than the last, rode forth to slay the zombie hordes, but when the last corpse fell, the Dynasts shining brilliantly with Essence, the massive hand rose and fell again, dragging the monstrosity forward once more, and a second, more horrific wave rode forth. The exhausted Dragon-Blooded had no defense against these Anathema-like horrors, no way to counter their dark magic, and within moments, the dead carried the corpses of these royal scions into the fortress atop the mountain of flesh. And then, its hand rose and fell once more, and the stink of it overwhelmed the city, a low groan issuing forth from the creature, and the third and final wave issued forth. Thorns had weakened itself too much in the recent war with the Scavenger Lands to protect itself, and worse, a traitor threw open the gates and damaged many of the city's defenses. It had no hope against the unliving hordes, the laughing, shrieking ghosts and the necromantic

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A Transcript of the Representative of the Mask of Winters

Addressing the Council of the Concordat

I thank the representative of Great Forks for her words and wish her family further health and prosperity. Her achievements are matched only by her beauty. I thank, too, the Council for affording me this opportunity to speak at such an august and wise body and express my hopes that satisfactory resolutions can be achieved on this day. Many speak out against the Council, calling it a useless body filled with meaningless debate and corruption, but I dismiss their criticisms. I have seen with my own eyes that the Confederation of Rivers has taken many great strides forward and represents a beacon of progress to all of Creation.

But the stink of rank hypocrisy creeps into these chambers, and the smell of it worries me. I listen to the harsh and undeserved words leveled against my fine city by the representatives of Lookshy and Marukan, and I wonder why this respectable body allows such deceptive, twisted rhetoric to be spoken here? If not truth, what does the Confederation of Rivers stand for?

We are not your enemies. Thorns was once an oppressive puppet regime that sought to expand its territories and waged war against all of the River Lands, but our armies have stopped them, liberated their people and given all of the Confederation of Rivers a new chance at peace. For this, we are accused of butchery. Why? Within your very midst lies Lookshy, a nation built upon war, a nation that prospers from death. Its people have unleashed far more devastating weapons in many of their ill-conceived campaigns than we have, and yet, you turn to us and accuse us of saber-rattling and the death of innocents?

Or perhaps you fear my nation because we allow the dead to walk side by side with the living? Sijan is honored today—and I greet her representative—but how is Thorns any different from this fine nation? In both, the dead are honored alongside the living. Indeed, the people of Thorns greet their long lost ancestors with joy and revel in their newfound sense of legacy. If you do not fear Sijan, why would you fear us?

If you would speak of oppression, look to the vile trade of slaves in your very midst. Thorns stands boldly with Nexus in condemning this abominable practice. Man should not bend before man, but stand before him as an equal. We work diligently with the Guild to provide the walking dead as a substitute for the denigrating practice of slave labor, so that when mortals have shed their crude husks of meat and bone in favor of the finer garments of ghostly gossamer, their bodies can continue to work for the betterment of their descendants.

Concerns have been raised over the Marukan situation. We have apologized for an accidental incursion of soldiers into Marukan territory. They were engaging in a war game and accidentally strayed too far. For the loss of life and damage to property, a settlement has already been reached and the sum of money travels even now to the Marukan capital. Regarding the two disputed villages of Shenden and Three-Steeds-Dancing, the first was always the property of Thorns, and I encourage the representative of Marukan to brush up on his history and re-examine his maps. The second chose of their own will to overthrow their local government and pleaded with Thorns to accept them as vassals. We could not refuse their request. This can be negotiated, but the final decision falls to the people of Three-Steeds-Dancing.

I hope we can allow truth to freshen our breaths and wipe away the stink of dishonesty. Only when we can stand with one another as brothers, assured that we can trust one another, can we be strong. Any disunity among us will only weaken us, making us easy prey for our enemies.

I surrender the floor to the speaker of the Council. Thank you.

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powers that tore apart dragon lines and soaked the city streets in foul blood. The sky darkened with clouds, and a new, everlasting night fell upon the city, never more to feel the unfiltered light of the true sun.

With its defeat so final, Thorns could never return to the city it had been. The Mask of Winters' skeletal fist closed about the souls of Thorns' living residents, subsuming them and their city into his will. His minions tore down the delicate palaces and refined government that ruled the city before and replaced them with monolithic structures, places of power that loomed over the citizenry. Then they erected smiling statues of their new lord in major plazas and crossroads, black iron sentinels that watch over the citizenry. They gutted ancient temples to the Immaculate Order and replaced them with self-serving shrines to the ancestor cult, demanding that living residents attend the shrines and pray, infusing their domineering masters with yet more power. Most of the living, for their part, resigned themselves to their fates, for what could they hope to accomplish against so mighty a lord? These dull-eyed slaves toil endlessly in mines, in bureaucracies or on the Mask of Winters' frontlines. They eat what food the Mask of Winters offers them but watch the granaries slowly empty, their children's cheeks hollow and the spark fading from their spouses' eyes. They know the city has already died and that they are just the last vestiges of life within it.

But where most have surrendered to the idea of slavery to the dead, some hearts still burn with defiance. Thorns was once a proud city, one that founded itself upon principles of excellence, valor and pride. These malcontents flit from house to house, huddled in the ruined portions of the old city, their bright cheeks and flashing eyes adding color to the drab undertones of the shadowland. Their laughter and conversation disrupt the otherwise complete silence of this ominous city, and they refuse to forget the glory of the city that once was. Proud parents whisper stories of the past to their children, passing on the pride of the fallen Thorns to the next generation. As though simply living in this deathly land wasn't defiance enough, these people actively plot against their undead masters. Caravans of food fall to bandits, a state-sponsored performance on the behalf of visiting dignitaries is disrupted, and barracks of occupation soldiers flare up in brilliant, crimson flame that crackles and roars as it consumes the shrieking spirits within. The faith Thorns placed in the Immaculate Order has not failed the city, for while the Dynastic advisors all perished in the destruction of the city, many mortal Immaculate monks survived. These holy men hide in the rebellious underground, employing their sacred thaumaturgy and their hard-won martial techniques against the unrighteous dead, acting as leaders and inspiration for the resistance.

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The Living

When the Mask of Winters came to Thorns, he uprooted the old caste system that governed the city before and turned the hierarchies of the city upside down. While vestiges of the old systems remain for the pretense of self-rule, many old nobles hide in the streets and many old peasants now work in the higher echelons of government. But all people in Thorns serve the dead. No real balance exists, and even the most powerful living members of the city must bow to the dead who stalk their streets.

Most people within Thorns who serve the Mask of Winters in any capacity are slaves. Oh, their burdens are far easier than those of most slaves in the rest of Creation, for mindless zombies perform most of the truly back-breaking labor that the Deathlord requires for his slowly expanding empire, but the living remain second-class citizens whose only purpose is to labor until death. These poor souls include foremen in smoky factories of black iron and roaring furnaces, who direct shambling corpses throughout their jobs, and quiet or mousy bureaucrats who hide behind desks counting beans and filling out paperwork for their pale masters. All mortals within the city struggle for survival, and while the Mask of Winters does nothing to make their lives more difficult than it already is, he also doesn't bother improving their plights beyond occasionally importing grain for his more favored servants. The Deathlord cares little if his mortal servants perish, for he can merely place an appropriate mark upon their brow and receive an intelligent ghost and a shambling corpse where a once living person stood. Still, the living can do things that neither ghosts nor zombies can do, so those who make themselves useful find they still have a few years of breathing left to enjoy.

A precious few who enjoy the favors of the Mask of Winters' reign are the traitors of the city. These mortals turned their eyes away from the plight of their fellow citizenry and, instead, cared only for themselves and their own families. Some among these numbers are cruel, greedy men who betrayed the city to the forces of death and received rewards for their loyalty, but more are simply mortals who saw the writing on the wall and knew where the fate of the city lay. These sad mortals tend to their families, do whatever the dead require of them and try to ignore the cries of guilt that wrack their dreams. A few self-sacrificing mortals realize that the Mask of Winters isn't likely to be defeated in their lifetime, so they offer their services to him not out of desire for rewards, but out of hope that they can influence his edicts and protect the city from the worst of his excesses.

For whatever reason they serve him, these mortals perform vital tasks for the Mask of Winters. Foremost, they act as his living representatives. The Deathlord allows Thorns to feign self-rule, and these well-dressed mortals attend the court of the Puppet King, debating meaningless policies and entertaining foreign dignitaries. In a city where the citizenry has come to associate the dead with oppression, the presence of a warm voice and a soft hand can greatly ease otherwise difficult situations. Many former artisans turn their talents to state-sponsored art and plays, creating vast murals that depict the Mask of Winters' beneficence or plays filled with propaganda for the ancestor cult. Some among the living act as playthings for the dead, whether as beautiful courtesans or playing some role in a ghost's fantasy (such as a motherly ghost hungering for a mortal "child" upon whom to dote). These sad mortals whore away their lives for the sake of their family—and enjoy greater prosperity as a result. Finally, the most terrifying of these mortal servants, the Thornguard, receive Hardened Killer training at the hands of the Mask of Winters' Abyssal servants and form an elite guard and secret police. All of these "traitors" receive the Mask of Winters' mostly benevolent attentions, and while some in the city spit upon their actions, their families are well-fed and clothed, and their voices are heard.

Still, not everyone in Thorns accepts the rule of the Mask of Winters. Many simply exist outside it, hiding away in the ruins of their old city, struggling to live life as they can. These street-rats often dress in rags, their hair disheveled and dirty as they run from alleyway to alleyway with pounding hearts and ragged breath, avoiding the clutches of ghostly soldiers. Others remember the old ways, the living sun, the pride of their people, and they remain determined to see the city restored to what it once was. They trade propaganda in the Undercity, reminisce about old times and plan for quiet assaults or forms of defiance against their ruler. This underbelly of rebellion and survival crosses paths and mingles with crime, still rampant throughout the city as mortals take to less savory means to find a way to live. Indeed, for some of the more "respectable" citizens of Thorns, rebellion and crime have become synonymous, as unwashed, rag-clad bandit-warriors are the only faces of defiance.

The Dead

Without a doubt, the dead rule Thorns. While some shadowland cities offer equal accommodation to the living and the dead (such as Sijan) or at least pretend to (in the Skullstone Archipelago capital Onyx, for example), the Mask of Winters seldom bothers with any such pretensions beyond the comfort of the mortal elite that serves him. Thorns fell in war and suffers the same pain and ignominy that befalls a conquered city. The living huddle over meager portions of food while the dead march their streets, enforce their strange, atavistic laws and prime Thorns for further war. When they have a free moment from their service to the Mask of Winters, the dead enjoy spending time among the living, soaking up the reaffirmation of existence, the intensity of emotion and the prayer that only the living can offer. And so, when the Mask of Winters closes his courts and departs his halls, the streets of Thorns fill with emotion-starved ghosts.

Despite the situation, however, most of the Mask of Winters' ghostly minions do not reside in Thorns. Rather, they dwell in the Deathlord's citadel—or in Juggernaut itself. True,

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they do enjoys its bounty, and the mortals of Thorns, many still unbroken by their short experience with shadowland life, provide a bountiful feast of passion for the Deathlord's minions, allowing them new levels of melodrama in their stagnant unlives. But Thorns is not their city. It is their trophy, their victim, their plaything, and when they tire of it, they return home. Thorns matters to the Mask of Winters and his forces not for what it is, but for what it can do for them. Once they have wrung it of its usefulness and broken its citizenry of their life and passion, they will discard it, a broken and uninteresting part of their growing empire.

Not all of the dead in Thorns serve the Mask of Winters, though. Thorns has a long and proud history—and many famed ancestors who found their way into folklore and legend. Fed by the trickle of memory and praise heaped upon these folkloric heroes, the ancestors of Thorns lingered in their city well before the Mask of Winters descended upon it. For the native ghosts of Thorns, the fall of their city was a horrendous event. Few can turn a blind eye to the suffering of their own descendants, and while they deeply enjoy the ability to walk among their kin, to interact with them and live with them once more, the humiliation of Thorns' subjugation is too much for them to bear.

Those who have resolved to see an end to the Mask of Winters' reign are divided on how to go about it, though. The legacy of the Immaculate Order leaves many ancestral spirits weakened and self-conscious. They have defied their natural place to remain in the city and do not consider it right to allow their kin to exist in this half-living, half-fallen state. Yet, like all ghosts, they enjoy the chance to interact with their families and the living world once more. These ghosts grudgingly bow their heads and seek a way not only to free Thorns, but to rid the city of its vast shadowland. Other, more self-serving ghosts have dismissed the Immaculate Order. Either they feel they left the Immaculate Order behind when they chose to resist the pull of Lethe, or they weren't especially strong adherents in the first place. These ghosts revel in their newfound connection with their kin, and while they wish to oust the Mask of Winters and liberate their city, they don't see why Thorns cannot simply remain a

"We Wanted To Be Saved… Just Not By You"

Weeping children, jack-booted ghosts, an ancient city groaning beneath tyranny, a smiling, despotic undead sorcerer-king: These things might inspire players and Storytellers alike to seek stories of redemption and rescue, with the players' characters storming the city with their armies and battling the Mask of Winters in an epic duel. In many ways, this chapter is about precisely such stories (though others are possible), and Storytellers should not be discouraged from running such a series. Thorns exists to be saved (or to add a note of tragedy and darkness to your series). But if players expect parades and flowers to be thrown at their characters' feet after the liberation of the city, they might have a few surprises coming their way.

The people of Thorns were deeply proud. Many still are, and they cling to this pride as their only means of maintaining hope in the face of so much misery. These people also rely on their deep-seated faith in the Immaculate Order to pull them through these dark times, often attending hidden Immaculate ceremonies to rekindle their faith. Those who do not retain their pride and adhere to the faith often turn to the Mask of Winters' generous hands, soaking themselves in indulgent excesses and betraying their city. The former dream of a day when the Realm will save them, while the latter hope to delay any rescue so that they need never answer for their crimes.

Solars (or most any Celestial Exalted) who save the city will find themselves reviled as demons. Citizens who follow the Immaculate Order closely will believe Thorns has merely exchanged one despotic monster for another, and the Solar Exalted might find themselves battling the same resistance the Mask of Winters had. Those who served the Mask of Winters might serve the Solars, but do the Lawgivers truly want such vipers in their service? Even those who are willing to see the Solars as true rescuers will have their pride wounded, for it took outsiders to save them.

While Dynasts will have an easier time pacifying the city after liberating it, they too will face troubles. While the faithful citizenry will celebrate them, the members of the former regime will not, fearing retribution for their actions. The old Thornguard and bureaucracies will work against their rescuers to either regain the city for the Mask of Winters or take it for themselves. Worse, these people have the most experience ruling the city in recent days and make the best choices to appoint to bureaucratic positions. Even among the faithful, some resentment will linger over the length of time the Realm ignored their plight, and this will worsen if the Realm treats Thorns' poorly.

Of course, not everyone will hate their rescuers. Many will forsake the Immaculate Order after hearing the inspiring speeches of Lawgivers and watching these golden-wreathed warriors duel with the champions of the Mask of Winters. Dark men will repent of evil deeds and bow before their new rulers, hoping to work together to improve the city. This sidebar merely raises the point that not everyone will be so inclined and that the rescue of Thorns needn't be the end of a series.

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shadowland. After all, Thorns has a legacy they can be proud of, and they wish to unite the famed ancestors of old with the heroes of a new generation, envisioning a utopia of the living and the dead, working together to further the glory of their city. Whatever their leaning, the ancestors of Thorns work tirelessly to help whatever resistance they can find in Thorns. They even travel to other parts of the Underworld to seek assistance against the Mask of Winters' tyranny.

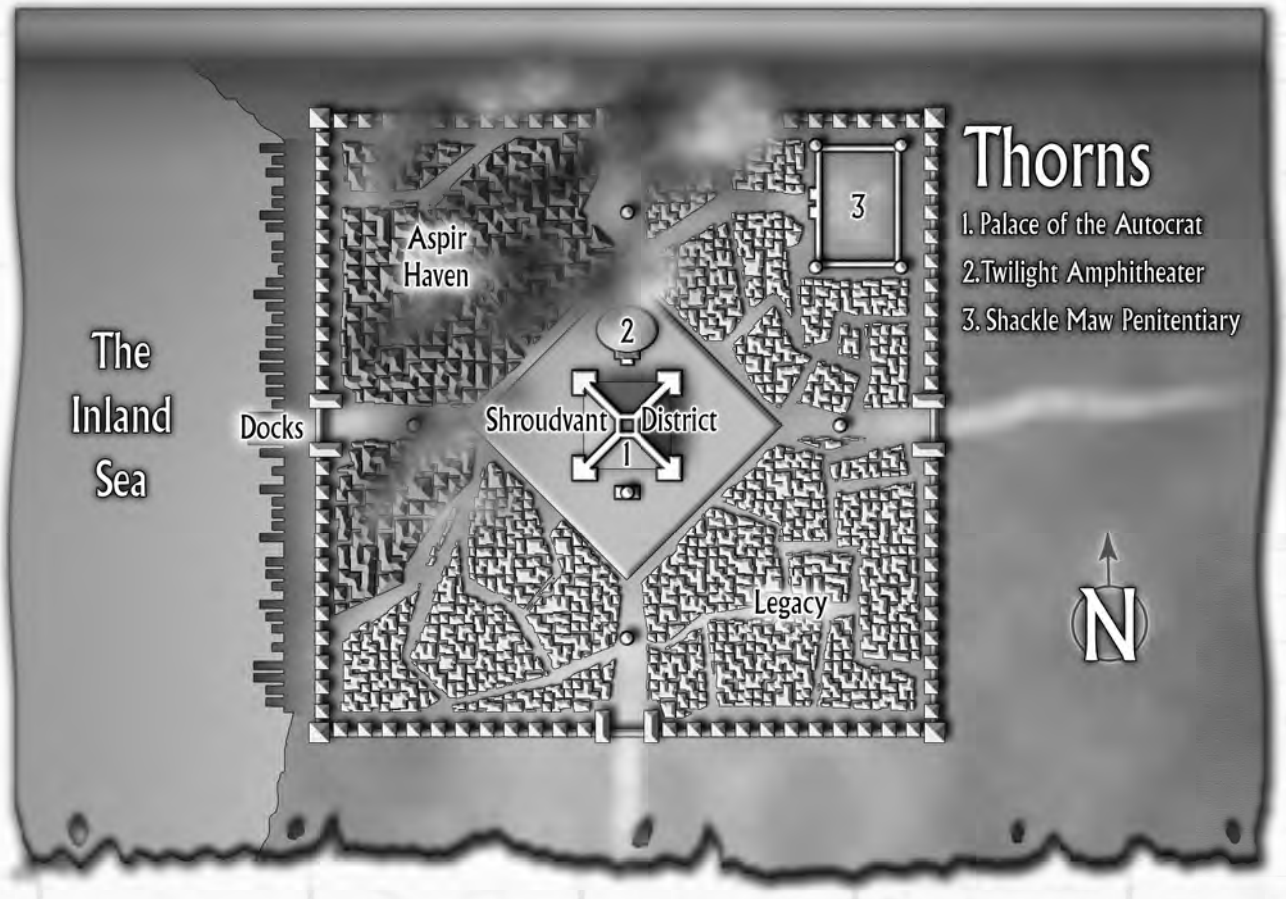
The Shape of a Broken City

When the Mask of Winters conquered Thorns, the people lost more than their lives and freedom: The very nature of their land changed as the Deathlord's magic withered the region and broke its dragon lines. Once, cheerful waves splashed in a natural harbor, but now, black water lies like a still, ominous mirror beneath the bone-white cliffs that surround the lagoon. The pleasant rolling hills and pasturelands that surrounded Thorns have fallen silent, their hills covered in a silvery-gray grass that whispers in the wind, roads lined with gnarled trees that support nooses, a grim reminder of the price of forsaking the Mask of Winters. To the south, where legendary vineyards once produced fine wines, the towering mass of Juggernaut rises up, a literal mountain of rotted flesh, spreading his vile stink. The occasional flash of violet lightning or shaft of moonlight illuminates the broken stone spires of the Mask of Winter's abode, high atop his undead behemoth-steed.

The first and foremost change the Mask of Winters wrought with his coming was the formation of a sprawling and ever-growing shadowland that engulfs the city. This shadowland is unusual in size, as most shadowlands that engulf this much space have formed over long centuries of warfare, accumulated tragedies or terrible and recurring curses. Yet, the shadowland around Thorns swallowed the city within the space of a few weeks. More interestingly (or horrifyingly), a sprinkling of shadowlands have sprung up all across the region that Thorns used to control, slowly enveloping local towns and homesteads. These shadowlands too grow until the main one connects with them and swallows them up, like a spreading pool of darkness consuming the droplets it touches.

Not every village in the region is consumed in a shadowland, and the Mask of Winters makes use of local, still-living villages as prosperous farmland for his mortal servants. While the farms of shadowlands still produce food, the fertile soil of Creation bears better crops, and those villages that remain healthy find themselves hosting grim-faced nemissaries and tired-eyed mortal soldiers who hold the villages in an iron grip to better feed those who still live in Thorns. Until, that is, the shadowlands swallow those villages up too, leaving everything under a blanket of a silent, clouded, Underworld sky.

Precisely why the Thorns' shadowland operates the way it does mystifies those rare few scholars who bother to study the subject. Most speculate that, when the Mask of Winters



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invaded, he unleashed levels of necromantic energies unseen in this world before. Creation has endured mighty sorcerous conflicts, but never apocalyptic necromantic wars. When he struck, he seemingly *broke* the dragon lines within the city, and evidence supports this claim, as many manses collapsed during his assault, and entirely new, Abyssal-aspected demesnes formed. These savants further postulate that the damage to the fabric of Creation in that region of the world makes it susceptible to new shadowlands forming more easily, so where a single murder might merely fray a few strands of Creation, in Thorns, it might cause irreparable and genuine damage. As a result, the depredations of the Mask of Winters make sure that the shadowland will continue to spread until it has engulfed all of the nation of Thorns, at which point (hopefully), it will stop.

Some scholars suggest a more horrifying scenario, though. When the Mask of Winters struck, they say, the traitors within the city served him up a vital asset: the City-Father of Thorns. The Mask of Winters took this proud and colorfully-dressed warrior-poet and skewered him upon a stake, letting him slowly slide down its length while his blood dripped forth. The death of this powerful entity tore apart the dragon lines of Thorns, and with each drop of blood, with each minute loss of life, the shadowland will grow until the god comes to a rest at the base of the spike, and the shadowland's growth will cease. Most scholars, of course, dismiss this theory as madness.

Regardless of how the shadowland formed, the effects of the war the Mask of Winters waged upon the city left lingering effects upon it, some stranger than others. When the Mask of Winters struck, he drove Thorns more deeply into the Underworld than most shadowlands, and while it operates as a normal shadowland does, it lies closer to the Labyrinth than most shadowlands do. The natural catacombs and sewer-ways mixed with the strange nightmare-physics of the Labyrinth to create a weird and ever-shifting underbelly to the city that many Thorns inhabitants refer to as the "Undercity." Monsters stalk the Undercity and the less secure portions of Thorns, hunkering over corpses or pooling beneath the feet of wanderers and sucking them into inky maws. Some are creatures of the Abyss, but others are unique to Thorns, such as former gods deformed and driven into madness by the changes to their city.

The powerful, necromantic effects the Mask of Winters and his minions used in the assault on Thorns left another legacy. Strange pools of Essence radiation still linger in the city and act as temporary, Abyssal-aspected demesnes. Too fragile to be made into manses, they usually dry up after a few years, though occasionally new pools occur. These dark Essence hotspots vary in appearance. Some are places filled with shifting regions of cold and slow moving shafts of ghostly white light, while others merely age the buildings in which they rest, giving the places an ominous feel. Regardless, these pools of dark Essence radiation bend the rules of reality within their borders, usually in small ways that people who know them can exploit. Mortals who spend too much time in such a place slowly change, mutating into creatures neither alive nor dead, and some join the ranks of monsters that haunt the edges of life in the city of Thorns. (Treat them as Wyld mutants in all aspects, save that those who grow too mutated to "leave the Wyld" have instead become creatures of the Underworld, growing weak or insubstantial in Creation, while remaining strong in the Underworld. In general, use mutations that reflect their darker, more ghostly existence.)

The Shroudvaunt District

In the center of Thorns, where the cobblestones of the wide boulevards angle upward, the city center rises above the rest as though Shroudvaunt is trying to shed the uglier parts of the city from itself. Monolithic structures of black marble loom above the city streets, watching everything with imposing, stone visages. In every major plaza and at the center of every major crossroad, statues of the Mask of Winters peer down at his subjects, attended by unkindnesses of croaking raitons that perch upon his unmoving arms or peck at seeds at his feet. The streets bustle with important bureaucrats and visiting dignitaries, their black robes slashed with colorful violet or crimson, golden jewelry glinting upon their fingers and throats. Thick perfumes adorn the wealthy who live here, and a strong potpourri of flowery scents hides the smells of decay well. Still, the voices that whisper here have a certain desperate quality despite their affluent accents and careful poise, and the eyes of these powerful men and women are filled with resignation. Except for the lyrical soliloquies of state-sponsored poets and the calls of the Mask of Winters' birds, Shroudvaunt has a peculiar quiet, as though the whole district holds its breath in wide-eyed worry over the Mask of Winters' next move. In many ways, when visitors describe Thorns, they speak of Shroudvaunt.

When the Mask of Winters conquered Thorns, he rewrote the district lines that had governed the city for centuries to better rule it as he saw fit. He blended the Scion district, where the old government had been, with a portion of the wealthy and palatial Shenjin district to create a new district that was both efficient and lovely. Here, the Mask of Winters set the seat of his government. In contrast with the rest of Thorns, Shroudvaunt is exceedingly pleasing to the senses, and her people force smiles upon their faces. The Mask of Winters needs a place where visiting dignitaries can be impressed by his benevolence and sophistication, so Shroudvaunt acts as a sort of tourist trap, a place where the Deathlord can entertain his guests. Not everyone buys into the trick, but many allow themselves to be swept away by the illusion. Better that than forcing oneself to acknowledge the Mask of Winters as a dangerous threat.

Aspir Haven

To the west of the city, black water soundlessly rises and ebbs against the harbor shore. Ships creak in their moorings while silent zombie work crews, their faces ashen and blue, shuffle on and off ships carrying heavy loads without complaint

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The Twilight Amphitheater

Less than a mile from the palace, the other great monument to power and culture within Thorns makes its mark upon the skyline. While not as tall as the Autocrat's palace, it manages to impress visitors nonetheless with its intriguing architectural design. The amphitheater itself rests in a depression in the ground, dug deep by its foundation-layers, and the scent of freshly turned soil still permeates the theater. Above it, a vast dome of glass and black-iron latticework shades the audience from any rain or wind. Candles hang from the metal framework, providing warm illumination while the tear-drop mirrors that surround the candles break up the light, sending occasional, shifting rays down upon the stage. When rain falls upon the dome, a mixture of the light and latticework makes it seem to glow and sparkle like flowing jewels. The Mask of Winters designed the Twilight Amphitheater himself using long-lost secrets of the First Age and his own architectural brilliance. The acoustics of the Amphitheater are nothing less than legendary, and a constant, soothing whisper washes over the audience like the waves of the sea, but the voices of the actors or performers cut the whispers away with but a word. According to some, the whispers are the echo of every word ever uttered in the Amphitheater, and the Mask of Winters sometimes stands silently upon the stage when the theater is emptied, simply listening.

The Twilight Amphitheater offers only the finest of entertainments, usually state-sponsored pageants of a vast scale or operas written by the dead in the service of the Deathlord. The Mask of Winters uses it as another apparatus of his vast propaganda machine, often bringing visiting dignitaries, whether diplomats or Guild representatives, to impress them with the beauty of his city and the culture it still retains. The elite of the city often attend, reinforcing their own wilting commitments to the service of the dead.

or emotion. A vast military-industrial complex consumes most of this district, with old, quaint seaside homes and storefronts crushed between spires of silvery steel and tightly constructed factories of black iron. Here, the stench of the rotting sea falls away in favor of the sterile scent of metal, and the low hum of machinery is punctuated by the occasional haunting cry of a whistle. To the north, the harsh efficiencies of this industrial section give way to more mercantile streets that abut the finer part of the Haven, filled with lovely shops and nice, if somewhat out-of-fashion, homes. The murmuring comforts of the marketplace or the forced friendliness of the inns draws in the wealthy sea-merchants and Guildsman with whom the Mask of Winters wishes to deal. But the cold of the harbor's winds seeps into the very souls of its residents, for the mortals here shiver beneath the burning eyes of their taskmasters and, watching the ungainly steps of the zombies that slave here, know their eventual fate.

No part of Thorns changed more than Aspir Haven. Once Brighting Harbor and the other half of the Shenjin upper-class residential district, the Mask of Winters chose it as a place to establish the industries necessary to build up his armies for the eventual conquest of Creation. Brighting Harbor already had formidable production capability, and the Mask of Winters merely increased its capacities until the entire district literally hummed with machinery. But the Mask of Winters also needed to present the same kindly, sophisticated face he shows in the Shroudvaunt District to visitors who come by sea, so the lovely ocean view homes of Shenjin remained, crafted into an entertainment street that catered to the needs of Guildsmen and merchants.

Aspir Haven serves as an economic nerve center for Thorns. While a great deal of trade goods come overland by cart and caravan, more come in from coastal traders. The Mask of Winters puts every effort into wooing the Guild and other financial contacts as he struggles both to expand his power and to improve his image. Primarily, Thorns imports raw materials that it cannot mine or farm, such as exotic ores needed for war machines or fine foodstuffs to feed the growing social upper-crust that devotes its time to the Mask of Winters' service. The Deathlord offers unusual goods unavailable outside of the Skullstone Archipelago and recently struck up negotiations with the Guild to provide legions of zombies as low-maintenance workforces. Strangely, Thorns engages in little slave trade. Having an entire city of mortals at his beck and call and limitless zombies to undertake physical labor, the Mask of Winters has little need to purchase slaves. Having too few skilled mortals to spare, he sells few slaves to the Guild. And while he has no objection to drugs, few in his city can afford them, though the wealthy and affluent servants of the Mask of Winters make heavy use of them when they can.

Legacy

Unlike the well-cared-for Shroudvaunt and Aspir Haven districts, the rest of the city slowly decays. The skeletal remains of unwanted houses huddle over narrow streets, occasionally groaning as they settle on their foundations and mortar sifts into rooms below. Amidst the gray buildings, however, an occasional flash of color suggests that people still live here. A flicker of blond hair flashes in the alleyway, and then, blue eyes peer out a window. Deeper in the old city, the dancing fires that shabbily dressed residents huddle around for warmth add a pleasant red glow to the windows of aging structures. Furtive citizens fall silent as the clash of iron-shod boots against cobblestones announces the presence of soldiers, come to drag some accused criminal screaming and weeping to her fate. For the bulk of Thorns, misery accompanies every waking dawn.

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The Stowing Lanes

Behind shuttered windows, huddled in dark alleys and hushed behind closed doors, the would-be refugees of Thorns struggle to find an avenue out. The roads from Thorns are closed to them by the prying eyes of nemissary-possessed raitons and wolves, and those who try hang from the trees, their necks snapped by a noose, as examples to others who would flee the Deathlord's "benevolence." But the Mask of Winters dotes upon outsiders who visit his city, and if a Guildsman wishes to take, say, a sweet child from the streets or a lovely youth and enjoy her hospitality upon his ship as a slave, the Mask of Winters is certainly willing to look the other way.

Some rare few among the Guild and outlying nations aren't as greedy or brutal as they pretend to be. They see the plight of those in Thorns, and while they speak honeyed words to the Mask of Winters, they turn to the concerned people of the city behind his back and offer secretive passage aboard their vessels. Sometimes, the stowaways simply hide in the cargo hold. Other times, the captain pretends to take the refugee on as a sailor or as slaves, dropping the pretense only when they reach their ultimate destination. This secretive escape from Thorns is fraught with peril, for the Mask of Winters will grow angry if he learns of the trick, and families entrust their children with strangers who could easily use the process as a ruse to steal away a lovely young woman or wide-eyed young man. Still, a surprising number of "former slaves" with haunted eyes in the Scavenger Lands are actually some of the few who have survived the escape from Thorns intact. Needless to say, they are silent about their origins.

In truth, the Mask of Winters needed Thorns as a beachhead into Creation, an access point from which to implement his plans. With an enormous labor force of zombies, ghostly artisans and legions of undying soldiers, the Deathlord had little use for the bulk of Thorns' population.

So, he left most of them to rot.

Legacy, sometimes called the "Old City," or referred to by their old district names, comprises most of Thorns, hidden away from visitors who come to see Shroudvaunt or Aspir Haven. It originally consisted of Rhiannan, a section of the city that contained a large marketplace for common goods and a renowned hospital; Isaac's Folly, a bawdy part of town filled with shabby theaters and cheap brothels; and Mend, the residential section for the lower classes. Now, the Mask of Winters simply lumps them all together into one district and ignores it. In theory, it acts as housing for his mortal labor forces, but in reality, he mines the place for misery and allows his hungrier minions to indulge their passions here. For the mortal population, survival matters most, and the residents quietly quest for food, shelter and clothing in any way they can. Without the watchful eye of the Mask of Winters continuously on them, many preserve the old portions of the city and try to keep the spirit of Thorns alive. Needless to say, the resistance has a strong following in Legacy.

The Shackle Maw Penitentiary

Deep within the bowels of the Legacy district, an occasional sob breaks the lazy buzz of flies. A massive and foreboding complex—once the Hoshosen Hospice, located in Rhiannan district—rises up from the clutter of abandoned structures around it. Grim sculptures jut out from its corners, and still-shivering corpses decorate the black-iron barbs atop its fences. The dark bricks and thick mortar of the place stink with rot and fear, and within, the heady miasma grows nearly unbearable. Prisoners in tattered garments cling to metal bars, and skeletal, starving hands reach out into the cramped hallways, clutching at those who pass by, pleading with them to stop, to help them, that this is all a mistake. This is the Shackle Maw Penitentiary, the most dreaded place in all of Thorns.

The Mask of Winters needed a place to house unruly mortal prisoners, so he transformed the hospital into something more… suitable. The conditions within are abominable, but the Deathlord wished it so. He created the prison as a place of torment and torture so that those who died within returned as festering spirits that he could use to haunt the living and expand his reign. When he created the prison, he used a variation of the necromantic spell that summons a citadel, infusing the old hospital with the essence of the Labyrinth. Deep below the prison itself, narrow and straight corridors lined with metal and soulsteel and lit with pale lanterns, form an underground necrosurgical laboratory complex, where dying prisoners are taken for their final moments. Skilled necromancers tear the twin souls of the mortal from her mortal frame, leaving a suitable corpse for zombification or other necromantic projects, a raging hungry ghost and a weeping soul bound to the Mask of Winters' will. While the prison exists, in theory, to contain prisoners, in practice, the population swells with whomever the Thornguard can haul off the street whenever the Mask of Winters needs to increase the population of his zombie work gangs.

The Undercity

Beneath the streets of Thorns, the Labyrinth met the catacombs and sewers of the city, and changed them into… something else. Claustrophobically narrow tunnels riddle

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the underbelly of the city, giving way to sudden yawning chasms or vast chambers that house secretive residences or even small, improvised villages of metal and stone. Blue lanterns with mesh housing or the pale glow of luminescent mushrooms punctuate the darkness of this subterranean maze, and half shadows dance and move just beyond a watcher's vision, tempting him to depart from his path. Some parts of these strange tunnels are safer than others, and where people reside, metal walkways ring with footsteps, and gutter trash dressed in colorful rags watch visitors with hungry and amused eyes. Beyond settled tunnels, water drips quietly in dank passageways, false echoes tease the spelunker, and occasionally, massive *things* shift and rumble with inhuman needs.

The Mask of Winters either does not know of this place or does not care. Regardless, except for occasional forays into the tunnels closer to the surface to nab a fleeing criminal, the Deathlord's forces leave the place alone. This makes it a haven for those who wish to live their lives just beyond the tyranny of the Mask of Winters' grasp. Immaculates set up temporary shrines to worship in peace, partisan fighters gather to meet and discuss plans, bandits bring their loot into their hideaways, and anyone seeking contraband or anything rare knows their best bet is with the unsavory denizens that live beneath their feet. Still, the Undercity exchanges one set of dangers for another. Although those beneath the streets evade the Mask of Winters' grasp, they must contend with pools of Essence radiation, strange lurking monsters and patches of unstable tunnels more akin to the Labyrinth than to familiar reality, always shifting and changing their path. Those who have lived here for the past five years have a solid understanding of their subterranean world, but new visitors should heed their advice, for the Undercity is a dangerous place indeed.

The Court of the Puppet King

At the heart of the Shroudvaunt District lies the Palace of the Autocrat, an impressive and beautiful structure that has changed little since the fall of Thorns. At its base, where a mighty statue of the founding Autocrat of Thorns once raised his ceremonial hammer above a forge, the Mask of Winters now stands in black-iron relief, his head bowed in supposed piety while a wicked grin remains affixed to his face. Behind the statue, a wide flight of stairs leads to a broad pavilion filled with thick timber pillars that support the curling eaves of black-tiled roofs. The multi-tiered palace lifts high into the skyline, each floor slightly smaller than the last to create a

The Seven-Tiered Sanctuary

Those who seek to escape the constant tribulation of Thorns or who desire unattainable goods often search out the storied Sanctuary hidden deep within the Undercity. Spider-gauze curtains drift lazily on half-felt breezes, ghosting around the patron who enters this den of iniquity. Within, half-melted candles paint a heavy pall of drug-smoke a shade of yellow, and the subtle laughter and sighs of contented debauches float in the air. The thick miasma of smoke contains many pleasing toxins that dull the senses, making time seem to slow and lines seem to blur (-1 to Perception checks, and players may make a [Stamina + Resistance] roll, difficulty 1, for their characters to resist). At the center of the Sanctuary, past baroque, wrought-iron railings that prevent a stumbling drug-addict from tumbling to his doom, one can peer into an open pit that reveals each of the five layers of the Sanctuary. Each tier is dedicated to one of the Five Immaculate Antitheses, and each caters to a different immoral indulgence, such as prostitution, gambling or recreational chemicals. The top and bottom tiers (the first and the seventh) contain the proprietor's offices and a storage house for weaponry and ill-gained goods, respectively. Rough-looking thugs of various size and armament guard the place with bemused, brutal demeanors and allow no Immaculate priest to enter.

A gentleman by the name of Silken Laughter owns the place and commands the ruffians and bandits who protect it. He is tall and slim, with delicate bones and elegant, beautiful features. Dark, silken hair covers half of his porcelain face, for Silken Laughter has only one good eye and vainly hides his imperfection. A short cloak falls from his narrow shoulders to his hips, a tight shirt of pale silk clings to his torso, and loose trousers flare over his feet, hiding them from view. Amongst pleasant company, his face always bears a smile and his deep, liquid voice easily charms those around him with quick quips and strange anecdotes. He takes no lovers, and torrid rumors insist that his heart belongs to someone he can never have, that his love goes forever unrequited. In battle, he wields slim daggers with frightening accuracy and works unusual magic with a unique, specially decorated set of mah-jongg tiles. Silken Laughter isn't human, though what he precisely is remains a matter of conjecture. He has been witnessed battling a deathknight to a stalemate, however, suggesting he is a creature of some power.

While an absolutely immoral bandit-lord and rogue, he opens up his Sanctuary to the resistance movement in Thorns, allowing them access to his resources and small army of thugs. This practice makes him popular with the downtrodden of Thorns, and he is, perhaps, the most vital member of the resistance, but his open mockery of the Immaculate Order makes many traditionalists suspicious of him and his motives.

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pyramidal structure, and at the very top sits a small balcony from which the Autocrat would survey his city. The balcony has not been used since the fall of Thorns.

The busy atmosphere that thrives within the spacious halls of the Autocrat's palace surprises many visitors as they first step past the gilded doors that mark the entrance. Nervously smiling ministers in black and red robes murmur behind the back of a bored and expressionless ghost as he drifts by. Loud debates fill the wide rooms that dot the multiple floors and both wings of the expansive structure. Yet, when silence falls, it is complete, for there are no echoes in the palace, and the air itself is cold enough to make mist rise from lips of the living. Within the throne room itself, pillars decorated in gold foil support a ceiling mosaic that depicts legendary figures from Thorns' past, while mirrors that show the dead as only wispy half images line the walls, making the throne room seem to extend infinitely. And at the far end, upon a basalt throne too large for him, sits the Autocrat of Thorns, often called the Puppet King. He is a withered gray man with flesh that hangs loosely from his bones and an iron crown sown into his brow. His mouth hangs open, his wispy beard spills onto his chest, and indistinct strands of shadowy black rise from his joints until they fade from view high above. Occasionally, he twitches to life long enough to shut his slack jaw and make a pronouncement with jerking motions of his hand, only to fall into his half-slumbering state once more.

Real power in Thorns resides not in this cleverly designed showcase, but in the hands of the mad sorcerer-king who rests in a citadel atop Juggernaut. Most don't bother to pretend otherwise, except to be diplomatic, and the court often ignores the presence of the Autocrat except at formal functions. Real law is dictated by ghostly representatives of the Mask of Winters, and real enforcement comes from his Thornguard. Most debates and legal proceedings are merely a bureaucratic circus, meant to entertain visiting dignitaries and keep the tremulous elite of Thorns busy.

Still, the Mask of Winters has no wish to micromanage every affair of his city, and he is not always available to express his desires, so the councils within Shroudvaunt can pull a few tricks from their oversized sleeves. In small, day-to-day affairs, such as the precise wording of a tax form or who should be hired to ensure the quality of street artists' performances, the local bureaucracies wield a great deal of power, and clever bureaucrats manage to turn these minor procedures into real clout. Few aristocrats wish to be bothered with a sudden explosion of red tape surrounding the education of their daughter, for example, and many wish to keep various embarrassing facts from being discussed aloud in court. In this way, minor officials gather their meager powers into real strands of authority.

Most politics in Thorns centers on gaining the Mask of Winters' ear, though, even if only for a moment. Usually, this is done through the Mask of Winters' representative in the city, the Unrepentant Soldier. A few mortals within the city have real pull with the Deathlord, however, primarily excessively useful servants (such as the Captain of the Thornguard) or the traitors who helped the Mask of Winters conquer the city, whom the Deathlord indulges to illustrate the benefits of well-placed loyalty. Politicians and courtiers cluster around these figures, trying to gain their attention, offering gifts and compliments and denouncing other courtiers who get too close.

A few factions have been particularly successful at gaining influence within the courts of Thorns:

The Unrepentant Soldier, the Exiles and the Ghost-Dancers

When the Mask of Winters' chief representative steps into the throne chamber of the Autocrat, silence descends, followed by nervous compliments and trembling sycophantry, for few are feared more in the court of the Puppet King than the Unrepentant Soldier. The stink of preservatives and dust oozes from him, for his flesh is not his own. As a profoundly skilled nemissary, he wears the androgynously beautiful Patchwork Regalia, a masterpiece of necrosurgery crafted from the mortal remains of the Dragon-Blooded who dared to defend Thorns from the Mask of Winters. The long, fiery locks of a Fire Aspect surround his lovely face and fall upon his broad, statuesque shoulders. The liquid onyx eyes of an Earth Aspect watch those around him with ill-tempered disdain. The soft, feminine lips of a Wood Aspect part to sigh with boredom. Combined of the flesh of 20 Dynasts, it mottles magnificently, slowly gliding from the shale white of his Earth-aspected shoulders to the snow white of his Air-aspected waist, with a myriad of patches and hues of pale skin visible between. If one looks closely enough, the subtle lines and markings of the stitching trace swirling patterns beneath his skin. The warrior wears long, flowing pants and a curving soulsteel reaper daiklave named Parting Sigh but little else, so that all may behold the beauty of his corpse-garment.

In life, the Unrepentant Soldier was a Lookshy legionnaire who perished in the Gunzota Incident. In death, the Unrepentant Soldier was among the Mask of Winters' most favored warriors, and for his service, he was awarded the Patchwork Regalia and a position as representative in Thorns, able to drink from its passions and vices at his whim. But the Unrepentant Soldier has grown discontent with his post and prize, for he has quietly begun to suspect that he is in exile. Watching the deathknights eclipse the favor of nemissaries with other Deathlords, the Unrepentant Soldier fears the same is occurring with the Mask of Winters, and that Abyssals are replacing him and his kind as the preeminent powers among the dead. This suspicion makes him brood, yearning to return to Juggernaut, and his ill temper leads to bloodshed in the court, as he's cut down three courtiers for offending his sight. The courtiers tread carefully around the nemissary now, dependent upon him for his ties to the Mask of Winters, but terrified of offending him.

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Those who cluster the closest to him take one of two forms. The mortals who manage to win his favor are those who truly admire the dead. Often rebellious youths enamored of nihilistic hedonism, they smear their faces with ash or paint themselves in gray, dressing in the fashions of the dead and supporting their actions with an unreasoning fury. The courts have named them "Ghost-Dancers." The dead who enter the Unrepentant Soldier's inner circle are those who feel themselves exiled from the Mask of Winters' presence. They tire of Thorns and wish to move on to bigger, better things, such as conquering the rest of the Scavenger Lands or simply doing something other than suffering the presence of petty mortals. The Exiles make use of the Ghost-Dancers as playthings, which amuses both sides greatly, as tormenting some ash-masked teenage boy brings a moment of respite to the Unrepentant Soldier's passionate malaise.

The Ghost-Dancers and the Exiles ally most closely with the Silken Faction, for the Mask of Winters seems to favor Wisdom Whispered, and they wish to gain the favor of the Deathlord. The other factions, however, work tirelessly to gain the Unrepentant Soldier's ear, in hopes that he will speak well of them to his master.

Wisdom Whispered and the Silken Faction

Next to the Unrepentant Soldier, the court swirls around Wisdom Whispered, a powerful mortal thaumaturge skilled in the Art of Necromancy. Sometimes called "the Little Tyrant," he is neither admired nor feared, but tolerated for his apparent popularity with the Deathlord and for the benefits he can gain his friends. Wisdom Whispered is remarkably short and very conscious of this fact, and those who are wise to his temper sit when he approaches to offer the illusion that he is taller than they are. He wears expensive clothing of the most recent fashion, but his unruly, thick brown hair refuses to remain in the braid he tries to tie it in, and scowl-wrinkles have formed at the edges of his eyes and lips.

Once called Kuntao, he worked as an advisor to the former Autocrat but grew discontent with perceived slights while his lust for the queen knew no bounds. Tempted by the whisperings of the dead, he struck a deal with the Mask of Winters, sabotaging his own kingdom wherever he could with subtle curses, venomous advice and seditious acts. When the Mask of Winters conquered the city, he rewarded the traitor with prestige and power, making him the "chief advisor" to both the Unrepentant Soldier and the Autocrat himself. Now calling himself Wisdom Whispered, the thaumaturge

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viciously wields his influence to indulge his long-repressed desires and petty revenges.

Those who cluster near him, the so-called Silken Faction, subscribe to Wisdom Whispered's bleak ideology: "Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we shall die." Wealthy merchants and greedy bureaucrats whisper praise into the hungry ears of the Little Tyrant, and he offers them decadence in return for mild favors. Those who betray him find themselves assaulted with blackmail and savage bureaucratic manipulations, so most who find their way into his service remain there. Together, they slowly drain Thorns of its wealth, beautiful youths and finer foods, but the members of Silken Faction don't care for the rest of the community as long as their appetites are sated.

Lilia and the Puppets

Wherever Wisdom Whispered goes, his pet follows. Once the Queen of Thorns, she has been reduced to a concubine, Wisdom Whispered's sexual plaything. Her majestic features are pearly white, she wears her black curls up to expose her swanlike neck, and her long, colorful robes hang low on her arms, exposing the depth of her cleavage. A delicate, silver collar adorns her neck, and bags of exhaustion mark her eyes, though they are usually covered by the paint she uses to make herself more beautiful. Despite her position, she has lost little refinement. Her words have a sophisticated accent, and she remains exceedingly proficient with the fan-language used in the courts before the Mask of Winters conquered her city.

Lilia gave in to the demands of Wisdom Whispered to protect her children from harm (her son has been inducted into the Thornguard, but her daughter hides in the Undercity) and to maintain what little power she had remaining. But she hates it. She hates him. His very touch makes her skin crawl, and she slowly goes mad with fury, resentment and despair. She would kill him, but she knows that would only result in her death, and Thorns still needs her. For now.

Nor is she alone. Some in the court still respect the Autocrat and the old order. Called the Puppets by the rest of the court for their respect of the Puppet King, they do what they can to support Lilia, who technically became Thorns' rightful ruler after the death of the Autocrat. Outwardly, they maintain sympathy for her, but do not act against Wisdom Whispered. Secretly, however, they have contacted the resistance and do what they can to bring down the reign of the Mask of Winters, or at least to return Lilia to her throne. To facilitate this, they have devised a code using the old fan-language, and when Lilia or one of her agents flutters their fan, they communicate with one another under the cover of merely expressing approval or disdain of something occurring in the court itself.

Stern Ashakawa and the Closed Fists

Where Wisdom Whispered is the domestic advisor of the court, Stern Ashakawa is its military advisor. Living up to her name, this icy woman has cruel features and flinty eyes. She wears her white hair cut short, and she prefers to wear either a formal Thornguard uniform (though with a black armband, rather than red, for she is not yet a member) or finely tailored skin-tight reinforced leather bodysuit. She never goes anywhere without her weaponry, and she favors the blade, the shield and the bow.

During her youth, Stern Ashakawa served as a footman during Thorns' ill-advised attempt to conquer the Scavenger Lands on the behalf of the Realm, and she has felt since that day that the armies of Thorns failed to live up to the legacy and prestige of her grand city. When offered the position of military advisor, she gladly accepted, determined to wipe out weakness within the armies of Thorns and right what her officers had done wrong. She fully intends to build Thorns into the empire it was meant to be.

Doesn't He Know?

The Mask of Winters is one of the greatest spymasters in Creation, and yet, a rebellion blooms within his own city. Insurgents lurk under his very feet and fill the court that rules his city. How is it possible that such a brilliant and ancient mind is so easily blinded by the actions of mere mortals? Shouldn't he already know of their plots?

Of course he does. He's just biding his time.

The Mask of Winters is, before all things, dead. Like the rest of the dead, he is filled with passion, for it is all he has left. While merely eliminating the rebels would be enough for an efficient, mortal king, the dead prefer to play games. They prefer melodramatic events with spectacular climaxes. The Mask of Winters doesn't want to defeat the rebellion. He wants to let the hopes of the people rise up to untold heights before crushing the rebellion completely in a breathtaking showdown that will destroy the spirit of Thorns utterly. He already has plans in motion, including double agents like Silken Laughter planted at the highest levels of the resistance, and when the time is right, these traitors, these Thornguard hidden in their midst, will turn on their own. The resistance will tear itself apart while undead soldiers stalk the streets, torching the homes of their families and rooting out the last vestiges of insurgency. And then, Thorns will know that the Mask of Winters is all-seeing and invincible, that rebellion is pointless.

The resistance, then, is doomed, for the people of Thorns simply lack the assets to defeat their undead tyrant. Not, that is, without help from someone truly brilliant and capable of standing up to the Mask of Winters, in which case, his hubris and hunger for melodrama could prove his undoing.

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Stern Ashakawa despises weakness in all forms. She regularly takes the time to mock Lilia for her pathetic position, and she ruthlessly upbraids anyone she feels doesn't live up to her standards. The court of the Puppet King frustrates her, however, for she wishes to see the armies of Thorns move, to take to the field, but she perceives the decadence of the Silken Faction as slowing this process down and holding back her empire. She struggles to gain the Unrepentant Soldier's attention to alert him to this—and to rid the court of Wisdom Whispered's influence so that she can begin the conquest of local lands in the name of the Mask of Winters. Those militants and hawks who agree with her cluster around her in support and call themselves the Closed Fists.

Stern Ashakawa is not without weakness herself, however. To her great shame, her every application to join the Thornguard has met rejection. She yearns for this final honor and deeply admires the Abyssal who trains them. The captain of the Thornguard sympathizes with the Closed Fists, but her envy of his position and training makes it impossible for the two to work together.

Senoske Malcolm and the Sandal Faction

Completing the triumvirate of councilors, Senoske Malcolm serves as religious advisor. Malcolm is a young man, gentle in demeanor, with long hair and pretty eyes. He dresses in simple robes and speaks with a soft voice, almost always smiling compassionately when he is not frowning in thought. When he was a youth, his family lived in squalid poverty, but with the coming of the Mask of Winters, his was among the families raised up to make a new aristocracy in the city. When he announced he would serve the Deathlord as a religious advisor in the Court of the Puppet King, his family rejoiced. So Malcolm has seen little wrong with the coming of the Deathlord. Indeed, he sees only the benefits that his coming has reaped.

In short, Senoske Malcolm buys into the Mask of Winters' propaganda wholeheartedly.

The charismatic youth isn't blind to the suffering of Thorns, but he believes much of it stems from irrational fear of the dead—fear he tries to assuage with carefully placed words and glowing testimonials. More troubling to the boy is the friction between the ancestral spirits of Thorns and the occupiers that serve the Mask of Winters, but he believes that careful negotiation between the two sides will help them understand one another better. His aura of serenity and his passionate words have sparked a following in the court, which the courtiers call the Sandal Faction for their penchant for walking the streets of Thorns to see events firsthand. Malcolm and his faction dream of a day when the ancestor spirits, the soldiers of the Mask of Winters and the living come to accept their situation and work together to create the utopia of which the Mask of Winters speaks so often. Unfortunately, the Silken Faction's crass abuse of the city only worsens the situation, so Senoske Malcolm does what he can to limit the influence of Wisdom Whispered, but even his legendary patience is wearing thin at the Little Tyrant's antics.

The Undead Might of Thorns

With the fall of Thorns, the Mask of Winters subsumed its paltry army into his own. While mortal components still exist in Thorns' military, he has added his own shambling dead and ghostly forces into the mix and has seriously upgraded the quality and training of the mortal soldiers he now commands. These three aspects make up the majority of his forces, with undead war machines making up the final component as he slowly builds his forces for an eventual expansion into Creation. Details of these various troop types, their numbers, their tactics, their deployment and their statistics for use in an **Exalted** game are given. (Some of these statistics have been reprinted from the **Exalted Storyteller's Companion** for ease of reference.)

Currently, the Mask of Winters plays a careful game of political cat-and-mouse with the nations of the Scavenger Lands, unwilling to reveal the full extent of his ambition. In his impatience, however, he has turned his armies against the Marukani and the small principalities that surround Thorns. No official declaration of war exists, and most of the actions are secretive and precise, meant to swipe small pieces of terrain or "persuade a village to defect." Whenever the Marukani protest, the Mask of Winters is quick to apologize for "accidents during training exercises" and grease the palms of the bureaucrats in the Council of Rivers. His ambition won't remain in check for long, however, and the moment he detects real weakness, his forces will strike.

The Shambling Dead

Description: Zombies make up, by far, the largest portion of the Mask of Winters' soldiers. Easily created, the Mask of Winters typically deploys them as a front-line assault to wear down his enemies and demoralize them. During the past five years, however, the Mask of Winters has been unable to use such an obvious hammer against his enemies and has turned many of his zombie hordes into a sort of simplistic labor force, doing jobs such as clearing rubble.

The Mask of Winters deploys zombies in hordes of 500 zombies or breaks them down (on occasion) into talons of 100, usually for deployment with agents such as Abyssals or nemissaries. Most hordes are organized and led either by more intelligent undead created by the necromantic spell "Summon the Greater Servitor" or a nemissary. Most hordes require a team of necrosurgeons to tend to damage after battle or to repair the fallen corpses and make new zombies. In Aspir Haven, a large resurrection pit has been crafted in the military complex near the necrosurgery labs for just such a purpose.

Commanding Officer: Varies
Armor Color: N/A
Motto: None
General Makeup: 500 zombies with a battlefield support lab

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The True Might of the Mask of Winters

Thorns has a formidable army by the standards of many nations in Creation, but compared to the truly great powers of the world and the Mask of Winters' foremost enemies (such as Lookshy and the Realm), they are less impressive. Further, when compared to the might of the other Deathlords, the Mask of Winters seems even less threatening. He lacks the might and military genius of the First and Forsaken Lion. While he is smooth and cunning, he cannot bend the hearts of mortals and gods with the casual ease of the Lover Clad in the Raiment of Tears. The Mask of Winters is renowned in the arts of necromancy, but the Dowager of the Irreverent Vulgate in Unrent Veils is clearly his superior. So whence comes the arrogant self-assurance of this, the youngest of Deathlords?

Part of it is simply hubris. He was unbearably proud before his death, and the words of the Green Lady have worsened his pride. He assumes victory because he has been promised it and because he has always been victorious before. Not all of his pride is undeserved, for while he is the youngest of the Deathlords, he is so because he was one of the longest surviving Solars of the First Age. And, indeed, his self-assurance often leads his enemies to double think their opposition to him, for certainly he must have some unique tricks available if he is so certain of victory.

But the Mask of Winters isn't stupid. He does indeed have an ace up his sleeve, a resource that he controls with greater facility than any other Deathlord in the Underworld does: spies. The Mask of Winters is the master of treachery and deceit, able to play unparalleled games of trickery and backstabbing. The Mask of Winters has spies in nearly every nation in Creation and has even managed to plant spies at the highest level of the Walker in Darkness's trust.

Should players want their characters to lock horns with the Mask of Winters, Storytellers should keep this fact in mind. Certainly, the Mask of Winters' forces will match or exceed the forces of the players in most any circumstances, and his spells are devastatingly powerful (but can be matched by the might of a Solar Circle sorcerer), but the Mask of Winters doesn't play fair. If he sees the players' characters are a growing threat, he may well head them off by offering to ally with them, rather than fight, aiding them against some mutual enemy (such as the Realm or rampaging raksha). Failing that, he'll put his vast spy forces to work, uncovering the characters' secrets and planting traitors in their midst. He'll know who they love and who they hate. Trusted officers will wait in the night to stab their beloved commanders, and lovers will be kidnapped as leverage. If the players have any weaknesses, the Mask of Winters will exploit them, bring them to their knees and then gloat over them before he destroys them. Those who find the Mask of Winters to be "easy meat" grossly underestimate his capabilities, for he's already turned his cunning into the first major Deathlord holding in Creation.

staffed by approximately 50 mortal and ghost necrosurgeons and necrotechs.

Overall Quality: Low
Magnitude: 5
Drill: 0
Close Combat Attack: 3 **Close Combat Damage:** 2
Ranged Attack: — **Ranged Damage:** —
Endurance: N/A **Might:** 1 **Armor:** 1
Morale: N/A
Formation: The Mask of Winters has roughly 60 hordes (the numbers vary as zombies fall into disrepair or new ones are raised). Approximately 45 of these hordes remain in Thorns, serving as labor crews or simply waiting for deployment. Five hordes have been split into talons and divided among agents who work against the Marukani, slowly swallowing more and more territory, and the remaining 10 are split up into talons working for agents in other parts of the Underworld or Creation.

The Pale Hosts

Description: The dead make up the most reliable portions of the Mask of Winters' forces. Skilled in Arcanoi of various types, they display power and endurance that no mortal army can match. In the day-lit world of Creation, however, it costs valuable Essence to materialize, so they remain primarily a force used in the Underworld. Still, they work perfectly for delicate assignments, such as the raids in Marukan, able to make their attack and then fade into insubstantiality.

War ghosts form fellowships of 30 ghosts each, and three such fellowships (plus added officer staff) form a full host of 100 ghosts. The Mask of Winters currently controls 50 hosts, organized into 10 separate divisions called phalanxes. (Note that units deploy in phalanxes only in the largest of battles, and this distinction generally represents administrative organization rather than actual tactical organization.) Nemissaries usually act as officers, but they occasionally form elite units as well, and three fellowships (one full host) are composed entirely of such soldiers. While the dead require little in the way of food, they prefer it, and they technically don't require sleep, but they often Slumber, so the pale hosts require as much maintenance as a human army overall. Indeed, the steep cost of equipping officers with jade artifacts makes them expensive units to field. When long journeys must be made quickly, the dead can forgo more necessities than humans can, and the expense of maintaining pricier officers pays off in units capable of powerful magic.

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Commanding Officer: Varies
Armor Color: Black
Motto: None
General Makeup: 100 war ghosts wearing lamellar armor, bearing target shields and wielding axes.
Overall Quality: Good
Magnitude: 3
Drill: 3
Close Combat Attack: 4 **Close Combat Damage:** 3
Ranged Attack: — **Ranged Damage:** —
Endurance: — **Might:** 3 **Armor:** 3 (-2 mobility) **Morale:** 3
Formation: Of the 50 hosts, 25 remain garrisoned in Thorns, where they train and wait. 15 exert the Mask of Winters influence in other parts of the Underworld, helping control the ghostly parts of his empire, and the remaining 10 act as commandos, controlling the zombie incursions into Marukan or engaging in police actions or pirate raids in other parts of Creation.

The Living Army

Description: Thorns has not forgotten how to fight, despite its twin defeats at the hands of the Scavenger Lands and the Mask of Winters. The natives are a defeated people, however, and many do not wish to serve the Mask of Winters and die in battlefields of his choosing. Of course, while the Mask of Winters prefers volunteers, he isn't above drafting reluctant youths into his forces. Living soldiers prove exceedingly useful, especially in Creation. They learn quickly, they need no Essence to battle in Creation, and when they die, both hungry ghosts and zombies can be crafted from their lower souls and corpses. Most of the young men and women who wear the heraldry of Thorns today do so with resignation and despair. Only fear of the Mask of Winters keeps them from desertion.

The Thornguard, in contrast, serves the Deathlord with terrifying fanaticism. These elite soldiers have trained at the hands of Abyssals, who sheared away their compassion and showed them the beauty of death. Now they act as perfect killers, coldly reveling in bloodlust, and more soldiers have distinguished themselves from the common ranks of their fellow soldiers in these units than any others. (As a result, the Thornguard has more heroic mortals in its ranks than the rest of the mortal forces in Thorns do.) These dreaded soldiers often patrol Thorns in their dark armor, wearing the blood-red armband of their station proudly. In battle, they always wear masks to hide their identity, not out of shame, but because the Mask of Winters sometimes wishes to deploy them as spies. Many fathers and mothers in Thorns have no idea that their sons or daughters have lost their humanity to the Mask of Winters' deathknights. They know only that their children disappeared shortly after the Deathlord took the city, and that they are grateful to have them back. When not in battle, those Thornguard soldiers with permission to act

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openly often dress in a formal uniform made of a black buff jacket and thigh-high boots with an array of well-polished buckles, as well the ubiquitous red armband.

The Mask of Winters organizes mortals in talons of 125, and four talons combine to create a dragon in larger battles. Nemissaries or Thornguard elites usually act as officers. Thorns contains 20 dragons of mortal soldiers and five dragons of Thornguard. Twelve of the mortal dragons garrison in Thorns while eight work against the Marukani, aid allies of the Mask of Winters in battle or otherwise exert influence in Creation.

Commanding Officer: Varies
Armor Color: Black, with red armband
Motto: "For the Mask of Winters and for Thorns!"
General Makeup: 500 soldiers wearing chain hauberks and wielding chopping swords supported by 150 archers in buff jackets using self bows
Overall Quality: Elite
Magnitude: 5 (Note that units deploy in this size only in the largest of battles, and this distinction generally represents administrative organization rather than actual tactical organization)
Drill: 5
Close Combat Attack: 4 **Close Combat Damage:** 3
Ranged Attack: 3 **Ranged Damage:** 3
Endurance: 9 **Might:** 2 **Armor:** 3 (-3 mobility penalty) **Valor:** 4
Formation: Of the five dragons of the Thornguard, two garrison in Thorns and act as elite police units, two work in Creation, and one works without uniforms to act as the enforcement arm of the Mask of Winters' secret police or spy agencies.

Walking War Machines

The Mask of Winters is a master necromancer and has at his disposal a large variety of war-engines. The foremost of these is Juggernaut, his ultimate weapon against large forces or heavy fortifications. Sometime in the future, the Mask of Winters hopes to use the enormous maggots that feast upon Juggernaut's mountainous corpse to act as inhuman beasts of battle, swallowing the forces of the Scavenger Lands and the local Underworld in their frenzy. (For more information regarding Juggernaut, see page **154**.)

The Mask of Winters also deploys a variety of other war machines, including no less than 50 spine chains and a few other artillery pieces or siege equipment meant to support his forces in battle. In addition, he has crafted 200 loathsome osseous shells, metal and bone exoskeletons crafted by the Mask of Winters as an answer to the Seventh Legion's gunzosha armor. While these artifacts have yet to see the battlefield, the Mask of Winters intends to equip his Thornguard with them to create ruthless killers unstoppable by the common soldier.

Thorns, a Magnitude 4 Dominion
Military: 2/4* **Government:** 2/3* **Culture:** 3
Abilities: Awarness 3 (Superior Diplomats +1), Bureaucracy 2 (Red Tape +1), Craft 2, Integrity 2 (Thornguard +2, Tight-Knit heritage +1), Investigation 1, Occult 3, Performance 3 (Propoganda+2), Presence 2, Stealth 3 (Spies +3), War 3
Virtues: Compassion 4, Conviction 3, Temperance 1, Valor 3
Limit Break: Compassion **Current Limit:** 8
Willpower: 7
Bonus Points: 20 **External Bonus Points:** 10
Notes: Wisdom Whispered, the Unrepentant Soldier, Stern Ashakawa, Senoske Malcolm and, of course, the Mask of Winters himself are all sorcerers (though only the Mask of Winters has legitimacy). Lilia, Silken Laughter and the Captain of the Thornguard are savants. Thorns' bonus points are tied into Presence, Occult and various specialties, while its external bonus points are tied up into War (raising it twice) and spies (raising it twice). Thorns hasn't increased its magnitude in a over a decade and sits at the cusp of expansion, if only the Mask of Winters can eliminate the resistance and ease social tensions between the living and the dead (in other words, successfully reduce Limit). The Attribute numbers after the slash represent current values due to previous actions, particularly the Mask of Winters' constant military build-up and his direct intervention with the government.
The Virtue Flaw represents Thorns' passions and pride. Though conquered, the people still remember what they once were, and damaging that pride has a negative effect on the populace.

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LASTLY, MA-HA-SUCHI'S GOATMEN HAVE BURNED DOWN ANOTHER PAPER MILL, LORD SATRAP.
ANOTHER? THEY'RE GETTING BOLD.
SOMETHING HAS TO BE DONE.
YES.
SEND WORD TO THE BLESSED ISLE IN OUR FASTEST SHIPS!
THEY MUST SEND REINFORCEMENTS TO HELP US DEAL WITH THESE TERRORISTS!
HA HA HA HA HA!
WHOO... SERIOUSLY, THOUGH, WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO?
OH, WE'LL WORK SOMETHING OUT, I'M SURE.
TELL ME... HOW SKILLED ARE YOUR NURI IN LONG-RANGE RECONNAISSANCE?

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CHAPTER SIX
LAST BASTION OF THE SCARLET EMPIRE

Situated on the east side of the Lesser Rock river, at the head of navigation below the 763-foot high Grey Falls, the city of Greyfalls is the last bastion of the Realm in the River Province. For 200 years, the town was a dumping ground for the dregs of the Dynasty and the worst criminals of the Blessed Isle. Almost a penal colony, it gradually and successfully transformed itself into a prosperous transshipment port that provided the Realm with almost 1,200 talents a year in trade value. Now, the city has become an armed camp, with the Imperial Army stationed here awaiting the day the Hundred Kingdoms attack—or the Realm orders them on the offensive.

Geography

Greyfalls is the largest city in a roughly triangular territory measuring 100 miles on a side, with the Lesser Rock and Greater Rock rivers defining two sides of that region. Low, rolling hills define a land of broad, shallow streams and Eastern hardwoods, punctuated by huddled towns set about with fields of hemp, flax and cotton. In more open country, fortified cattle ranches raise cows for meat, dairy and leather, while sheep herding and horse rearing are important secondary pastoral projects.

There is virtually no stone in the country, and most construction is of brick or wood. Local soils tend to produce yellowish brick, and so, most towns have a sandy color to them as they rise from green fields. Each town is situated beside a stream or river, with a bridge leading to the town's central plaza. The plaza, shaded by trees and cooled by a fountain, serves as the town's living room and a place to rest from the heat of the day. A shrine to the Immaculate Dragons, with its onion dome and minaret, usually stands on the western side of the plaza, with the governor's house on the north side. The best teahouse in town is usually in the southeast corner of the plaza. A net of streets and alleys branches off the plaza, connecting the center to the city wall with a maze of confusing streets.

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Every child growing up here becomes aware early of her place in the world. To the north and west, the mountains of the Metagalapan Range rise above the horizon, lightly whitened with snow. The sunrise is tinged green every morning due to the vast forests in the East. The roar of the Grey Falls echoes over the land and can be heard up to 30 miles away on days when the wind is right. Such a wide-open country lends itself to thoughts of freedom.

Occupation

Yet, freedom is not on the minds of most residents—not with the country habitually patrolled and inspected by units of the Imperial Army. Each town in the district has a governor, and while that governor is usually a local, he holds his post at the discretion of the satrap in Greyfalls. Some governors respect local traditions of consultation and consensus. Others rule by decree and gangs of hired thugs.

Occupation has brought a number of important benefits to the region. Thanks to Realm sorcerer-engineers, a series of deep wells makes rich water reserves available for irrigation of crops and herds. Six high-quality roads splay out into the countryside from Greyfalls, speeding the distribution of goods to local markets. Fortlets on the roads and on the Lesser Rock and Greater Rock have reduced instances of banditry and piracy. The people dwelling here are considerably safer and better protected than anyone in the neighboring Hundred Kingdoms.

A Wider Role

The Realm was not always a good friend to the area. Calling it the River Province Administrative District, it installed a tax office, a customs house and a legion garrison. As long as Greyfalls sent its tribute on time, the Empress paid little heed to any complaint coming out of the East. For 100 years, the satraps came from House Cynis. After that, Tepet, Iselsi and Cathak traded it between them for almost five centuries. None of the Great Houses treated the region well.

About 100 years ago, House Nellens secured the franchise from the Empress and made significant investments in the infrastructure of the district. It built the roads radiating out from Greyfalls, including one that approaches the Metagalapan Mountain Range. It restored the locks on an old First Age canal that bypassed the Grey Falls, increasing the distance that ore barges could travel to upland mining communities by almost 100 miles. Then, it built manufactories for glass, crystal and porcelain, to take advantage of local sand, lead and kaolin deposits. More recently, Nellens paid for deep wells that boosted fiber plant irrigation and lent assistance to local families in the weaving and papermaking industries to start workshops of their own.

Their investment fueled a construction and attendant economic boom. Despite being politically suppressed, Greyfalls and the region around it became an economic powerhouse, producing 1,266 talents of value in raw and processed goods a year. Yet, House Nellens failed to anticipate how much a profitable satrapy needed to be defended from enemies foreign and domestic. In the last 20 years, Greyfalls has become an armed camp, and Nellens has relinquished much of its income to the needs of the Imperial Army.

Frozen Wood

Two hundred and fifty miles east of Greyfalls lies the shadowland called the Frozen Wood. Even in the height of summer, icicles hang from the winter-bare branches of trees standing knee-deep in snow, and the narrow and shallow Boulder River on its eastern flank runs cold year-round. The Frozen Wood runs approximately 100 miles from north to south, but is rarely more than 15 miles wide. It was the site of a large but ultimately futile battle between River Province forces and Realm legionnaires that occurred late in RY 90, just as the peace treaty granting Greyfalls to the Realm was being hammered out.

The City of Greyfalls

Greyfalls the city occupies a spectacular location, on the eastern slopes of the Lesser Rock River below the Grey Falls. The yellow-brown of the city's defenses and public buildings contrasts with the shimmering waterfall, easily 10 times the height of the city's tallest minarets. Red-tile roofs are the rule, but occasional flashes of blue tile lend some color. Many of the city's streets are adorned with wall murals and patterned mosaics, though few iconic depictions exist. Greyfalls nominally follows the Immaculate Philosophy.

About 55,000 people live in Greyfalls and its suburbs, while an additional 475,000 live in the larger territory. The rambling walls with their round towers 65 feet high enclose a circuit of seven square miles. Greyfalls is a typical district town writ large, with promenades of yellow brick circling tree-shaded plazas. A shrine to the Immaculate Dragons or one of the local gods anchors each plaza. Most structures are three or four stories tall, with shops on the ground floor and offices or apartments above. Many wealthier families build towers too, so Greyfalls is a city of domes, spires and minarets rising out of the fog. Many captains time their arrival to twilight, when sunset wreathes the city in an illusion of flame and smoke.

Six districts define the city. Closest to the falls and lowest on the slope, is Mist-town. Nooji Plaza lies slightly downriver and higher on the slope. Canal Gate is the main docks and warehousing area at the downriver end of the city, where the Nellens canal joins the Lesser Rock River. Above Canal Gate is a middle-class neighborhood called High Quarter, with the fancier garden district of Alder Plaza behind it. On the highest point overlooking the city is Garrison Heights, where the satrap and the legion dwell secure.

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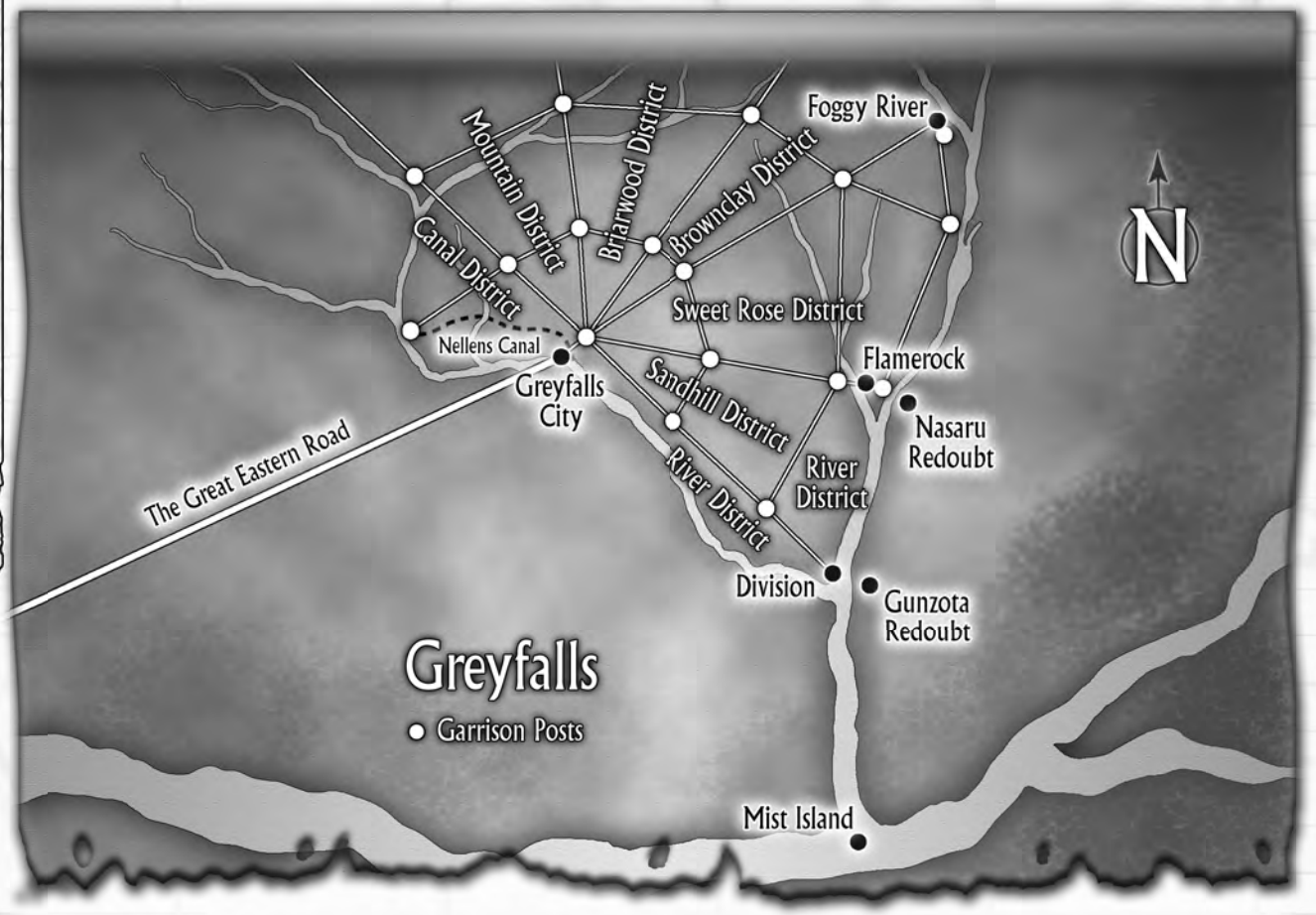

Mist-town

While the Grey Falls are quite beautiful, the spray and fog rising from the falls is damp and cold. The value and prosperity of a given property increases in direct proportion to its distance from the waterfall and the expanse of its views. Closest to the falls, Mist-town's working-class streets are perpetually filled with fog. The waterfall's thunder echoes in the streets as a perpetual booming sound. Everything here is green, as moss, lichen and ivy worm their way into mortar and brick. People who live here tend to be poor and relatively sickly, but proud. A few Nellens factories along the river here make use of the fast-churning water to pound plant fibers to the mush used in papermaking.

Nooji Plaza

Nooji Plaza lies slightly downriver of Mist-town. While less foggy and damp than Mist-town, Nooji Plaza is somehow less inviting. The city's brothels and beggars congregate here, and kaffés on the plaza sell pastries laced with opium, hashish and other chemical pleasures. A syphilis outbreak began here 10 years ago and continues to wrack the community.

When the Shogunate ruled, the Lesser Rock Bridge crossed into Greyfalls here. The bridge's arch fell into the river long ago, and the Realm uses security as a justification for not repairing it. Across the river stands the eastern edge of the Hundred Kingdoms, so the garrison prefers the bridge remain closed to traffic coming from that direction. Instead, 40 small ferries transporting about a dozen passengers each make the round trip several times each day between shores. On the Hundred Kingdoms side, the Great Eastern Road begins, which ploughs a straight-as-spear course through the Hundred Kingdoms to Marita before turning and making its way to Melevhil. The road surface consists of well-fitted stones on a bed of heavy gravel.

Canal Gate

Canal Gate, at the city's southern end out of the fog, is a triangular patch of ground between the first lock on the Nellens canal around the Grey Falls and the Lesser Rock River. Here, on a corniche built of imported stone, ships from the Realm and all the states of the Confederation of Rivers tie up, in order to trade River Province goods and materials for Realm manufactures. Warehouses overhang the river in places, and slave-powered cranes draw bales of goods right out of cargo holds. Taverns, teahouses and brothels line side streets, along with flophouses and shrines for migrant sailors and workers. Coal and ore barges exit the lock on their way downriver or transfer their loads to ships from Nexus. The crowded streets ring with Rivertongue, High Realm and more exotic tongues, and professional translators hawk their services on many street corners.

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At the center of Canal Gate is Market Plaza. Brightly colored tents stand in orderly rows, which officials have carefully measured and taxed. No one bothers to organize similar goods together. Instead, ragmen and knife sharpeners deal side by side with traders in porcelain and silk. Legal trading hours run from sunup to sundown, and the price of a booth is Resources 1 for a small stall (barely large enough for a seller and buyer to stand together) to Resources 3 for a large stall (enough space for six or seven tables of goods).

Khanzar's, a three-story establishment specializing in chocolate drinks and delicacies on the southwest side of Market Plaza, is the unofficial headquarters for Guild business in Greyfalls. Each of the Great Houses of the Realm also maintains an office and showroom on the plaza.

High Quarter

A series of ramps and alleys leads out of the bustle of Canal Gate into the more sedate High Quarter. Nine small plazas divide this area into several separate neighborhoods. Most Greyfallers involved in legitimate business have shops, showrooms and homes in this district. The wealthiest neighborhoods are located on the west side of town, overlooking the falls. The four plazas on the east side of the ridge, however, are quiet and pleasant and no less sought after than the flashier residences.

Fanaze, considered the best papermaker in the Threshold, has her shop in the High Quarter, on the eastern side where the fog will not ruin her wares. Several times, she and her family have been almost kidnapped to the Realm to work there, but Bronze Faction Sidereals have collaborated to foil these plots, preferring to use her as a cat's-paw locally.

Alder Plaza

A single ramp with a gate leads out of the High Quarter into Alder Plaza, considered the highest-class and wealthiest neighborhood in the district. Inhabited by the wealthiest local merchants and by Realm families without the clout to live on Garrison Heights, the houses here are usually cloister-like, with large garden courtyards in the center.

Garrison Heights

On a diamond-shaped platform atop the city stands Garrison Heights, which is not so much a neighborhood as a fortress. Reached by a narrow winding ramp through the city, or by a gate that opens directly onto a platform beside the Nellens canal's second lock, Garrison Heights houses the Realm's satrap, the legion that defends him, a priory of the Immaculate Order and the palace of the Scarlet Empress. Windswept and virtually devoid of trees other than in the palace and priory gardens, the Heights command the city and enjoy a spectacular view in every direction, for planning a military campaign—or watching the approach of an invading army.

Government

Few satrapies are ruled so directly by the Realm as Greyfalls. Since the River Province Administrative District actually produces genuine income, the Thousand Scales insists on having a significant say in local affairs. As a result, the development of local government is stunted and half-stillborn, with many locally appointed officials regularly checking in with Imperial supervisors. Newcomers from the Realm find the process tedious and exasperating but soon learn the wisdom of the system. Lacking finely honed political instincts, the natives defer to the Realm's desires often in contradiction to their own best interests. As a result, Greyfalls has been solidly wedded to the surrounding region, without any signs of the incipient nationalism that has been so troublesome to the Realm elsewhere.

The Imperial Satrap

The chief Realm official in Greyfalls is Nellens Rombulac, a thin, elegant Dragon-Blood of the Water Aspect. His swift brush sweeps out rivers of ink, commanding the whole district to bend to his desires. For almost 50 years, he has held this prestigious assignment without often resorting to military force. He's done his job by keeping the peace: Troops cost money and eat into profits. For most of his tenure, Rombulac assumed that he, plus a squad of four Dragon-Blooded magistrates, a vartabed of the Immaculate Order and two Terrestrial Exalts commanding a dragon of troops each, would be enough to keep the region in line, especially since each of the eight Exalts had at least 500 followers.

How times change! Rombulac's face sours at the thought. Since the Empress's disappearance, the satrap has had more than double that number in his territory. His relatively disciplined Peleps troops are gone, replaced by a disheveled and arrogant legion of criminals led by a pack of cashiered officers. There are four warstriders parked on Garrison Heights! The army siphons off men and materiel that used to pay the annual tribute and administer the province peacefully. The Order brought in three more Exalted monks. When one of the magistrates was killed a year ago, three more joined the three that remained. Ostensibly, the new ones are searching out the murderers. Rombulac knows they are only avoiding the assassins who are hunting down magistrates back on the Blessed Isle, though.

For all that, there are still judges to appoint in the market towns of the hinterland, a court to oversee, taxes to adjust, and merchants and emissaries to placate. The satrap supervises almost 1,000 bureaucrats, both Realm-born and local hires, and an expensive network of spies and informants. Rombulac is overworked and no longer commands the same respect he once required to do his job. He clearly believes the world is slowly going mad.

The Scarlet Major-Domo

Bretegani Wild Grove is the major-domo of the Scintillating River Palace, the theoretical home-away-from-home of the Scarlet Empress. A stocky brown-haired patrician in his 40s, Wild Grove received the appointment 10 years ago when his daughter Exalted and was adopted by the Peleps

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family. Simultaneously exiling and promoting him to a distant satrapy cut familial ties and gave him his reward. His wife still has not forgiven him. How could she? Wild Grove still hasn't forgiven himself.

Wild Grove has thrown himself into a new kind of work for the Realm, even so. As major-domo of a palace the Empress never used, Wild Grove organized a series of dinners, banquets, hunting parties and Gateway tournaments to honor local notables and visiting dignitaries. Structured around loyalty to the Realm, these gatherings developed Greyfalls' middle and upper classes as conscientious citizens of the Scarlet Empire. In the elegant rusticity of the River Palace, nobility and merchants mingle, playing at being patricians in a manse at some Dynast's grand party.

Wild Grove knows the boors who make up this mockery of a noble class have atrocious manners. They are crude by the Realm's standards, poor in both wealth and knowledge. Yet, ruling over them and playing host to these gatherings gives him a small taste of what it would be to be like his daughter—a Prince of the Earth and a lord of men. Unfortunately, his gatherings are not so pro-Realm as he believes. Conspiracies hatch there often enough that Rombulac is worried.

The General

General Cathak Kitono, an 87-year-old Dragon-Blood of the Fire Aspect, commands the Twenty-Third Imperial Legion. He holds his soldiers in high regard—they are merely dogs as opposed to rats or dung beetles. Often surrounded by a faint nimbus of blue-orange flame, Kitono shows open disdain for the major-domo and subtly subverts the satrap. He is really in charge in Greyfalls, and these lesser men are merely overcautious old fools.

Ordered to Greyfalls by the Deliberative after the disastrous destruction of the Tepet legions, Kitono brought only his immediate general staff and a handful of scouts and sergeants. He sent the Peleps house troops home and recruited from the slums and prisons in Greyfalls and the surrounding principalities. As his officers joined him in ones and twos, Kitono brought more and more dragons into existence, gradually calling a genuine imperial legion into being, hundreds of miles to the east of Lookshy. He even managed to smuggle four warstriders upriver into Greyfalls, where they hunker behind the Garrison Heights walls, invisible to the city below. Bribery and overland hauling brought several lesser weapons such as Essence cannons and implosion bows to the city, and his engineers have used local materials to construct catapults and trebuchets.

Now, Kitono waits for orders—officially. Unofficially, he has sent scouts into many of the neighboring territories. His immediate staff ponders the information and tries to determine which state is weak enough to fall without much fighting. His goals are to bring about the replacement of

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Rombulac with a Cathak satrap and to double the size of the Realm's footprint in the East.

The Vartabed

As the representative of the Mouth of Peace and the Immaculate Order, Sister Cloud Hands leads a monastic establishment of three additional Dragon-Blooded. Together, the four preside over two monastic communities (one for women, the other for men), 56 temples with full-time acolytes and 185 minor shrines. Over 400 monks, nuns, vartabeds, acolytes and her own Dragon-Blooded colleagues look to her for guidance, and she has good words for them all.

This does not keep her from becoming stressed out, though. Kitono's blatant militarism gives her fits; she feels awkward playing the living legend at Wild Grove's parties; and Rombulac is only pious when the tax accounts balance, which is rare these days. She personally hunted down four Anathema in the last 50 years (with some help, she would modestly admit) and took down her share of obstreperous gods. Guiding the religious life of hundreds of thousands of people is far more challenging to her.

Her greatest challenge is the custom of portraiture in Greyfalls. Many people have little cabinets or niches in their houses with pictures or statues of local gods, spirits and elementals, and people only smiled when she railed against them in her sermons. Now, however, the Air Aspect bites her tongue on the subject, for the devout have begun carrying pictures of her. The steady trickle of Essence from their devotion has led Sister Cloud Hands to some dangerously heretical ideas.

Local Governance

The Realm received the town of Greyfalls and "attendant territories east of the Lesser Rock and west of the Boulder and Pebble Rivers" in the peace treaty of RY 91. At least in part, this agreement was reached because no one else wanted that particular stretch of land. It was poor for agriculture since there was little surface water, it lacked any great mineral wealth, there were no First Age ruins worth mentioning, and there was virtually no government to speak of. The country was a series of sheep and cattle posts in wild country, interspersed with trading outposts and farms: lightly settled and sleepily unwilling to join the larger world.

The Realm inadvertently wrought much change in the passage of nearly 700 years. Greyfalls' role as a transshipment port opened its people to new luxuries. Not silk and jade, of course, but new cooking spices, a broader range of foods, fine pottery and glassware, books and paper. With these latter luxuries came new ideas: education, medicine, sanitation and even the idea of villages and towns. The Realm planned on staying for the long term and invested in the country's infrastructure: the city of Greyfalls itself, the roads and caravansaries and postal hostels, the military watchtowers, the Nellens canal, deep wells to reach the aquifers and planned market towns in the hinterland. It hired workers to help build them and trained others to maintain and regulate them. From the Realm's point of view, these improvements were necessary investments in what amounted to a family business over three Dragon-Blooded generations.

Yet, to the people of Greyfalls, living a mortal life span, their world is prosperous farmland netted together with a web of towns and roads—towns and roads they themselves built and now maintain. The Terrestrial Exalts hear stories from their grandparents about hunting komodo rats in the Greyfalls region, but mortal mothers tell their sons about their great-grandmother "who started the stock exchange" or their great-great-great-grandfather, "who was the first merchant in town, when this was just a village." The komodo rats are but dimly remembered in the tales of heroic ancestors.

Many a town now has a school, a regular market, a seasonal fair and a set of common laws. The river towns of the Greater Rock have set up a unified weights-and-measures commission to write a common legal framework for trade. Banks write complex financial instruments, insurance agents write elaborate policies, and museums and antiquarian societies arise. Many towns have a courthouse with a judge who *might* have been appointed by the satrap, but might just as likely have been appointed by the town council. Some towns are highly democratic, others are deeply oligarchic, and still others are miniature tyrannies run by small bands of thugs. There are simply not enough Dragon-Bloods in Greyfalls to notice these sorts of things. The Princes of the Earth might be able to do anything, but they cannot do everything.

Most of the populace remains committed to the Immaculate Philosophy and respects the Dragon-Blooded deeply. Towns look to the Realm for ideas in fashion, in education and in government. Many people cannot help but look around and wonder exactly what it is that the Dragon-Blooded do, though. Greyfallers look everywhere and see their own achievements, barely recognizing the Realm-built infrastructure as the foundation on which the origins of their nation stands.

At present, the greater Greyfalls satrapy is divided into seven districts, divided from each other by the military roads radiating out from Greyfalls. In order, from northwest to southeast, these districts are Canal, Mountain, Briarwood, Brown Clay, Sweetrose, Sandhill and River. The small towns of Foggy River, Flamerock and Division mark the eastern border of Greyfalls' territory and are famous for smuggling and lawlessness.

Economy

Greyfalls almost could not exist without the Realm, which is the source of its wealth, its prestige and its security. Were the Realm to leave, the current standard of living would almost certainly evaporate. Still, the infrastructure that the Realm installed would yet remain, and that would continue to help the land prosper to some degree. Maintaining that infrastructure, and the tax revenues that accrue from it, is

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Incipient Nationalism

All things must come to an end, and the Realm's dominion in Greyfalls could be next. Wild Grove's parties have spawned a slow conspiracy among a number of landowners eager to turn Greyfalls into a new Nexus. They are prepared to back a likely candidate—perhaps even an Anathema—to a throne in Greyfalls, if he will throw off the yoke of the Realm and install them as the country's nobility. At present, they have been reluctant to admit any of the merchant families to their schemes, but the plotters have been working on raising a private militia, designing banners and recruiting local gods to their cause. In the absence of the Empress, many gods are eager to endorse the idea of home rule—and worship of a local pantheon.

critical to the Realm's continuing involvement in Greyfalls. It is a source of pride to the Greyfallers themselves, as well, and would likely help Greyfalls become a major power in the East, were it given a chance. Although they mock it as a tool of the Realm, Greyfalls' neighbors look on with envy. The Guild, above all, considers Greyfalls a potential prize of incalculable value. It remains to be seen how much of this value is genuine, and how much is a chimera, likely to vanish unexpectedly.

Trade

The heart of Greyfalls' wealth is its trade with the Realm. Officially, imperial trading companies may not trade with the states in the Confederation of Rivers in certain goods: The actual list of prohibited items runs over 100 pages. Greyfalls, as a protectorate of the Realm, can trade with whomever it wishes. Therefore, cargo ships travel hundreds of miles upstream from the towns of the Yanaze—away from the Realm—in order to deliver goods and raw materials destined for the Blessed Isle.

Greyfalls merchants receive the goods, sell them to their sponsoring Realm trading partners and pocket a small commission charge. Realm vessels then transport these purchases downriver on imperial cargo vessels, making good use of both wind and current. The significant costs of the upstream journey are borne by Confederation trading compacts, or the Guild, rather than the Realm, which only bears the downstream costs.

Some costs are involved in sending Realm ships so far upriver, but such costs are mitigated to some degree by basing shipyards in and around Greyfalls, which construct cargo vessels and load them with Realm-purchased goods. Realm companies can then sell used hulls in Port Calin, and transfer the crews to new vessels coming downriver from Greyfalls, already loaded with cargoes for the Blessed Isle. Greyfalls agents can even take possession of used ships in Port Calin, and take the crews from the new ships to sail them upriver trading as they go. In this way, Greyfalls makes use of the free port at the river mouth to manage trade all the way to the headwaters.

There is a precarious balance involved in the whole operation. With the Empress gone, more states along the river feel entitled to stop, search and tax individual ships from Greyfalls or the Blessed Isle. More merchants are also willing to travel across the Inland Sea directly and bypass the usual restrictions with bribes. As Greyfalls grows in wealth, it becomes more expensive for merchants to do business there.

Realm Operations

The Realm involves itself in a large number of different operations in Greyfalls. Many of these are agricultural or industrial in nature and tend to be large scale. The White Jade Porcelain Factory in the Brown Clay District, for example, produces 500 sets of formal dinnerware every month. The Wood Dragon Shipyard in the Canal District launches 30 cargo hulls a year. Sandhill Crystal produces more than 1,000 crystal bowls every week. Even high-end papermakers such as Fanaze make hundreds of sheets at a time. The Realm profits because House Nellens has inculcated a serious work ethic and a pressure to meet international standards of excellence in the whole native population. Exert tight controls on a country's education system for 20 generations, and such things are possible.

Nellens also introduced the idea of individual compacts to Greyfalls. In this way, a petty bureaucrat from the Blessed Isle could befriend a few Greyfalls families, and her salary (while low at home in the Realm) could help her buy the start-up equipment necessary to some business the Greyfallers wanted to begin. Good record keeping meant that families who cheated the Realm in the early years often lost out decades or centuries later. Now, many individual Realm bureaucrats own pieces of Greyfalls businesses, either as silent or active partners. This ownership often leads to conflicts of interest, but it also helps create new wealth and new businesses for the Realm's accountants to tax.

Greyfalls is now internationally renowned for its porcelain, its glassware and its paper, but other industries are catching up to these high standards. Greyfalls shipbuilding is now widely regarded as equal to the West's in some ways. Furniture making, house kits and other wood products are becoming important. Brass-works and bronze-works are gaining in reputation as well, and book-copying (achieved with dozens or hundreds of scribes in long, well-lit rooms) is becoming as important as papermaking in the area. Some enterprising courtesans have hit on the idea of printing books of their erotic adventures, with woodblock illustrations, and even this scandalous business has a few discreet bureaucrats funding it.

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Guild Operations

By law, vessels and caravans operating under Guild auspices may not trade anywhere but Greyfalls itself; the outlying country is closed to them. As a result, the Guild maintains only an unofficial station in Greyfalls, though individual merchant princes are welcome to set up shop there if they require. Two minor caravan routes roughly skirt the edges of the satrapy, carrying on independent trade with folks living on the fringes of imperial control.

The Guild is trying to learn from the Realm's investment patterns. It regularly sends individual agents into the satrapy with sacks of silver, attempting to reach people with good ideas who barely exist in the sight of regular bureaucrats. Picking out good ideas for investment is much more challenging without a centuries-long tracking system for separating scams from genuine intentions. Nothing can prevent even a likely investment from turning sour, of course.

Still, the Guild has managed to accumulate a few successes, so it secretly owns shares in many businesses where it is not able to operate officially or legally. Many of these operations are small: jewelry stores, brothels, inns, teahouses, small wineries and paperworks, nurseries and orchards. A few are larger, however. The Guild has had some success in financing the construction of a few covered markets in some towns and has explained the concepts of stock exchanges, banks and insurance agencies in others. As a result, the Greyfallers have been slowly educated about a variety of financial systems, and a shadow economy has grown up alongside the legitimate Realm economy.

Local Matters

The Realm's greatest difficulty is that, by turning Greyfalls into a transshipment port, it has robbed itself of the potential to make money in truly splendid fashion. Goods made on the Blessed Isle are expensive in Greyfalls; the cost of making them and shipping them across half of Creation is substantial. As a result, many Greyfallers buy products made by the Confederation of Rivers. These manufactures may be of poorer quality, but they are certainly serviceable—and cheaper. Laws prohibiting satrapy residents from trading with Nexus or the other River Province towns for goods to be used locally would only underscore the distance between the Realm and the local populace.

Moreover, Greyfalls produces a broad spectrum of goods, and much of what it produces is high quality. Not weapons, of course: The Realm tries to avoid letting its dependencies produce military equipment. Still, the satrap and the general and numerous soldiers and bureaucrats and monks have all noticed that their own tables are set with Greyfalls glassware and ceramics, that they write their orders and decrees on Greyfalls paper and that many of the ships in the canals and rivers are Greyfalls-built. The officers from the Realm notice, especially, just how many of their own troops are Greyfalls-born.

Now, thousands of miles from the Imperial City, every citizen of the Blessed Isle ponders a complicated question: Is Greyfalls a place of exile, far from home… or is it home? How they answer that question determines, in large measure, who their friends are and how much they are prepared to invest—financially, spiritually and militarily— in the future of Greyfalls.

Culture

For those who see Greyfalls as home, there is much here to celebrate. For most of the last 600 years, it has known only banditry and barbarian raids. Unusually for anywhere in Creation, no great armies have marched through in over 200 years. Even the Fair Folk invasion in the mid-500s hammered into the Hundred Kingdoms, west of Greyfalls. The satrapy was a second-rank target, to be overwhelmed after the neighboring states were conquered and destroyed.

Yet, the absence of barbarism does not necessarily mean the advance of civilization. Music, drama, literature, dance and even storytelling tend to promote the appearance of dangerous ideas such as mythology, theology, philosophy, politics and independent thinking. Culture, if you will, leads to nationalism, and forbidding the emergence of nationalism is high on the satrap's list of priorities. Satrap Rombulac discourages the construction of theaters, music halls and dancing establishments. Poets, writers and singers are taxed and harassed. One of the satrap's predecessors successfully eliminated the national instrument, the double-theorbo, from even the consciousness of the people of Greyfalls by killing every player and every instrument builder and importing thousands of cheaply made lyres and flutes for 100 years.

The result is a general paucity of native art forms, other than the small statuettes and portraits of gods and spirits on household altars. Even these are risky, since an Immaculate monk could subject offenders to months of relentless philosophical education, sometimes with the hammer of her fist. Tavern singers tend to learn songs of the Blessed Isle and the Realm, professional storytellers focus on the deeds of the Dragon-Blooded, and even slave-girl dancers are a definite oddity in Greyfalls.

The Nuri

There are a number of ethnic groups in Greyfalls. Jewelry and clothing styles tend to be the main distinguishing marks between them, although facial features play a role as well. The Nuri are the most powerful of these ethnicities: The Realm draws from this tribe for judges and local officials quite frequently, as the Nuri were the original inhabitants around the city of Greyfalls itself. The Nuri have curly red-black hair and gray-brown skin. They tend to wear silver and amber jewelry, and the men dress in caftans and trousers, with elaborately wrapped turbans on their heads. Women wear long cotton or silk saris embroidered or woven with elaborate patterns. The Nuri like bright colors and startling

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contrasts: a yellow turban might be matched with a blue caftan or a purple sari with a bright green veil. They are the second-smallest but second-wealthiest ethnic group in Greyfalls.

The Nuri were once a tribal people, locally reviled and frequently enslaved, but the Realm released them from bondage and armed them. In return, the Nuri became the Realm's loyal servants. Over time, they have become a caste of merchants and magistrates. Endowed by the Realm with the symbols of power, they have relished and retained them for more than 600 years. Other ethnicities in Greyfalls resent them for controlling so many of the best opportunities for work. The Nuri constantly worry that a new satrap might replace their faction with another.

The Tanu

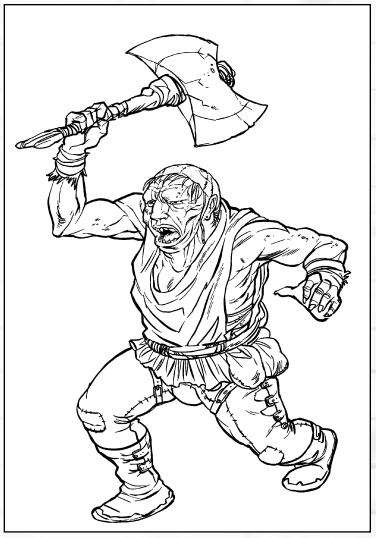
The Tanu, with yellow-brown skin and straight yellow hair, seem to be a product of more northerly climates. Wearing their hair in braids or dreadlocks, adorning themselves with citrine or amethyst beads, they dress in four or more layers of different shades of brown and gray. Originally arriving in Greyfalls as refugees out of the Hundred Kingdoms during the time of the Arczeckh Horde in the mid-300s, the Tanu now form the largest ethnic group in the satrapy. Despite their long-term residency, they remain distinctly second-class citizens, working as skilled and unskilled laborers in factories and on the docks. Few of them accumulate enough wealth to penetrate the upper levels of society.

The Miruda

The Miruda, frail and absurdly tall, with turquoise skin, tightly coiled black hair and six long fingers on their left hands, were changed to their present form in the Fair Folk invasions of the mid-500s. Barred by imperial law from holding any high offices because of their Wyld taint, the Miruda have nevertheless proven their usefulness to Greyfalls as skilled artisans, where the extra finger comes in handy. The Miruda operate smithies, pottery studios and crystal manufactories, and their skills as gem-cutters are legendary. The Miruda form the core of Greyfalls' middle class. Unable to rise in the hierarchy but not suited to heavy labor, they have carved a niche for themselves in society and seem quite content with it.

The Zaranthi

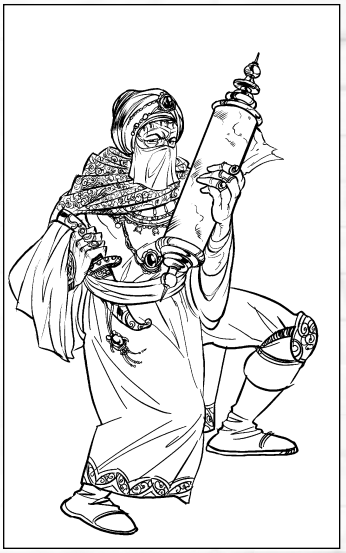
Squat and well-built, with mottled brown skin and little body hair, the Zaranthi are the descendants of a barbarian horde defeated and enslaved at Foggy River in RY 177. Difficult to master and ill-suited to slavery, the Zaranthi now exist in a quasi-free state as a rural working class. They run hemp farms and cotton plantations and show a surprising knack for getting unruly plants to grow in difficult places. Virtually no paths to economic or political advancement are open to them except through the Realm's army. Remembering their ancestors' lineage as warriors, they follow imperial officers with almost fanatical devotion—sometimes even serving under the same Dragon-Blooded commanders who slew their multi-great-grandfathers.



The Confederates

A growing number of Greyfalls residents come from the states of the Confederation of Rivers. While not exactly citizens, they often bring substantial wealth to invest in mercantile businesses and manufacturing ventures. This wealth lends the newcomers credibility and social status they would not have otherwise.

The Confederates are the most potent source of change in Greyfalls. Most are first- or second-generation immigrants, seeking closer political and economic ties to the Realm. Yet, they have none of the local aversions to art and entertainment.



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Their tastes for music, drama and art are bringing about a slow revolution in the attitudes of Greyfalls' more restrained citizenry. Although barred from holding political appointments, many Confederates become active in local town councils where elected leadership positions are available. Many Confederates are wealthier than the Nuri.

The Islanders

The Islanders, as citizens of the Realm are called, are the smallest and wealthiest ethnic group in Greyfalls. Numbering approximately 10,000 adults, they ride through the city and country as if they own the land, and in large measure, they do. Approximately half of them form the backbone of the local bureaucracy and the officer corps and support staff of the army. Many of these Islanders are single and have only a few slaves or locally hired servants to take care of their needs. The others are typically merchant factors or patricians connected to the trading establishments of the Great Houses. Often, they are in residence with their spouses, children, servants, slaves, majordomos and numerous cousins and distant nephews.

Despite being such a small percentage of the population, the Islanders leave a large footprint. Even the poorest bureaucrat or junior officer can own a large townhouse with a complete staff of gardeners, housemaids, footmen and butlers. Most Islanders don't stop with a townhouse but treat themselves to a hunting lodge or country residence as well. More than a few manage four or more dwellings—a lodge in the north for hunting, a country house a few hours' ride out from Greyfalls, a river estate for fishing and a main residence in the city itself. Nor do they live small. They eat off the best porcelain, dress in the best silks and send letters on the best paper using the Realm-style postal service. The Islanders throw lavish parties for one another on a regular circuit of events through the year. These parties, with unusual entertainments not found in Greyfalls, are rarely open to any but other Islanders. Yet, Nuri hostesses and Confederation spies ply servants with money, drink and gifts for information about who attends, what was served and what was done and said.

The differential between the wealth of the Islanders and the wealth of the Nuri is substantial. Even the wealthiest Confederates find it almost impossible to match the Realm's standard of living. The Nuri and the other tribes rarely get to attend such functions. With the exception of Wild Grove's events, even wealthy Greyfaller natives are almost invisible to the citizens of the Realm.

The same cannot be said of the Realm's citizens. Their parties, their doings and their movements are widely known and widely reported. By ignoring their servants and looking past the people of Greyfalls, the Islanders have created a potentially dangerous situation: They know almost nothing of the land, but the land knows nearly everything about them.

Military

As the Realm's last important territory in the East, Greyfalls is surrounded by numerous and hostile forces. To the north are the hawkriders of Metagalapa, to the west are the petty principalities of the Hundred Kingdoms, to the southwest is the Confederation of Rivers, and to the southeast and east are the forest tribes, the Lunars and the Fair Folk. As a result, Greyfalls is more solidly defended than most of the Realm's other satrapies. Yet, for several centuries, this defense was little more than a paper screen, as the Realm sent its more useless military officers and weakest bureaucrats to this remote territory, pushing them out of the seething cauldron of imperial politics.

Recently, however, those officers and bureaucrats, recognizing how unwelcome they were in the Realm, chose to build a lasting organization in Greyfalls. Recruiting from the Zaranthi and the other native peoples, they have built a legion trained to imperial military standards and numerous other forces worth their salaries. Cathak Kitono has led this effort personally in several ways. In part, he seeks to wipe away the stain on his reputation from military failures in the Southwest several decades ago. He also believes, though, that Greyfalls could be cut loose from the Realm in the near future and might have to go it alone for a time. He is thinking about dividing his legion into two and training up of enough soldiers to put two legions in the field. To do so would be far outside his orders, though, so he is dithering about putting this plan into practice. Solid news of Anathema in the region, or aggressive actions by neighboring states, will certainly prod him to action.

Kitono has four warstriders but feels trapped in a Yozi's bargain. Taking them out of the city on maneuvers will reveal their capabilities to all his potential foes, while not using them will put his troops at a disadvantage if Kitono actually needs them. Additionally, Kitono knows that he is not in legal possession of them. Cathak agents liberated them from imperial warehouses, and it is conceivable that Kitono himself could be punished if the wrong people find out he has them. For now, he leaves them on Garrison Heights, though he might send them into the field if compelling urgency persuaded him to risk them.

Realm Forces

The core of the Realm's forces in Greyfalls is a fully trained imperial legion, headquartered in Garrison Heights within the city walls. The Fire-aspected General Cathak Kitono leads them and commands the 10 Dragon-Blooded

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who serve as his legion's dragonlords. He also commands four dragons of medium infantry household troops lent to him by House Cathak, though these troops are not officered by any additional Dragon-Blooded.

Kitono faces the same challenges of any warlord of any city-state in the River Province. He must hold the city and the port in order to keep control of his territory. Yet, he must hold the surrounding region in order to feed his city and keep his port open. A threat could come from anywhere.

Accordingly, Kitono has dispersed his house troops in talon-sized garrisons throughout the country. In each of these 16 fortresses, Kitono's orders are that two scales are to be on patrol, two are to be on guard duty and as a reserve force, and one is off duty at any given time. Twenty-five men on leave in a town will cause some trouble, but they will stick together and show the flag, while two groups of 25 men on patrol are enough to give most bandits pause, and a garrison of 50 is enough to deter many attacks. House troops may be poor quality, but they are skilled enough to deal with most bandits.

Kitono keeps his main legion, his crack troops, close to home. His officers exercise each dragon on a fairly strict schedule, with four of the 10 dragons on patrol out from the city every day. Two dragons stand guard duty within the city, and three stand guard along the Nellens canal and the lower stretches of the Lesser Rock River. The remaining dragon is off-duty. Once a month, Kitono schedules a general training exercise for six of his dragons, with the remaining four assigned to guard duty. Once a season, Kitono pulls house troops into the city and canal districts and runs his whole legion through a series of exercises.

23rd Legion, Fifth Dragon

Description: The Fifth Dragon of the 23rd Legion is a medium infantry unit, consisting of 750 mortals between the ages of 19 and 25; most are Greyfalls natives, usually Zaranthi. Trained to fight with spear, sword and in reinforced lamellar armor, the 500+ legionnaires are devoted to their commander, as are the 250 slingers who support them. They are less fond of Tatoru, the dragon's thaumaturge, whom they see as dangerous, shifty and unprofessional.
Commanding Officer: Mnemon Ice Hand, a Dragon-Blood of the Water Aspect, leads the Fifth Dragon.
Armor Color: Blue with white diamonds
Motto: "To Battle!"
General Makeup: Four talon-lines of medium infantry.
Overall Quality: Elite
Magnitude: 6
Drill: 4
Close Combat Attack: 4 **Close Combat Damage:** 3
Ranged Attack: 2 **Ranged Attack Damage:** 2
Endurance: 8 **Might:** 1 **Armor:** 2 (-2 mobility penalty) **Morale:** 4
Special Characters: Mnemon Ice Hand, Dragonlord; Tatoru Yereva, Thaumaturge; Brother Fair Eye, unit doctor and chaplain.
Formation: Due to Ice Hand's skill at manipulating water, the Fifth Dragon's usual assignment when not on training maneuvers is to guard the upriver end of the Nellens canal and prevent raiding from the Hundred Kingdoms.

4th Cathak Lion-Talon

Description: The Cathak Fourth Lion is a light-infantry unit stationed until recently in Harborhead. General Cathak Kitono cashed in a number of favors owed him by his House to have the unit, renowned for its bravery and battlefield successes against overwhelming odds, reassigned to Greyfalls, all part of his long-term plan to expand the Realm's presence in the Scavenger Lands through military means.
Commanding Officer: Kuruga Numo, a patrician associated with House Cathak.
Armor Color: Tawny yellow buff jackets.
Motto: "Hear us roar!"
General Makeup: Talon of light infantry, trained with javelins and slashing swords. Supported by 30 slingers, 10 archers and 10 cavalry scouts.
Overall Quality: Fair
Magnitude: 3
Drill: 2
Close Combat Attack: 3 **Close Combat Damage:** 3
Ranged Attack Rating: 2 **Ranged Damage:** 2
Endurance: 5 **Might:** 1 **Armor:** 1 (-1 mobility penalty) **Morale:** 3
Special Characters: Kubus Rasaluda, the Fourth's best commander and tactician, commands the third scale. If his training regimen were put into effect, the talon's overall effectiveness would rise by one dot across the board.
Formation: The Fourth Lion holds the garrison at Silver Lake, on the Rock River. Holding the easternmost point of Greyfalls territory, they are considered the best troops in the Cathak forces.

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Greyfalls, a Magnitude 3 Dominion
Military: 2 **Government:** 3 **Culture:** 1
Abilities: Awareness 2, Bureaucracy 3 (Red Tape +2), Craft 2 (Public Works with no Local Flavor +2), Integrity 1 (Immaculate Edicts +3), Investigation 2, Occult 1, Performance 2, Presence 3, Stealth 1, War 2
Virtues: Compassion 3, Conviction 2, Temperance 3, Valor 2
Virtue Flaw: Temperance **Current Limit:** 5
Willpower: 6
Bonus Points: 15 **External Bonus Points:** 8
Notes: Sorcerers in Greyfalls will tend to be Realm officers, such as the satrap, Nellens Rombulac. There could be savants among the locals — likely of the Nuri — but probably no sorcerers. The city's inherent bonus points are wrapped up in, as always, specialties, as well as the last dots of Presence and Investigation.
House Nellens appreciates and protects its satrapy, providing everything from economic assistance to legions when necessary; its entire War score, for example, comes from the external bonus points granted by the Realm. Nellens' resources have, however, lately become reallocated, and Greyfalls does not enjoy quite as much investment as it used to. Even so, it should be noted that most of Greyfalls' power still comes from the Realm — if the Realm were to leave, it would probably lose a lot in consequence; potentially, it could even fall apart and drop an entire dot of Magnitude.
Subjugated for so long, the people of Greyfalls have had ineffectuality beaten into them. Dreamy and cautious, if they manage to do anything, it is whisper of revolution — but they never actually accomplish much. In Limit Break, they will not take any positive action whatsoever.

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WHAT BOTHERS ME MOST IS THE BUGS.
BUGS?
YEAH. LIKE HOW THERE AREN'T ANY.
THIS CITY'S SURROUNDED BY JUNGLE, BUT I'VE SEEN NONE SUCH AS A MOSQUITO ANYWHERE.

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CHAPTER SEVEN
THE EMPTY CITY

Denandsor, Proud and Hollow

Near the southern edge of the Scavenger Lands, in the small (some might say forgettable) country of Melekin, two weeks journey south from Great Forks and due east of Thorns, lies the city of Denandsor—or at least its beautiful, well-preserved corpse. Cities, by definition, are places where people live and work, and Denandsor, the so-called "City of Makers," is no longer such a place. All that remains of Denandsor is an extensive collection of stunningly beautiful First Age buildings harmoniously laid out along empty streets, the blue gems of its beautiful and placid cooling ponds, an amazing array of mechanical entities and a pervasive miasma of madness. Not even the ghosts of the dead can escape the effects of the city's curse. Consequently, Denandsor is a blighted treasure house of First Age wonders that has succeeded astonishingly well in keeping its secrets to itself.

The Noble Past

At the peak of the High First Age, Denandsor earned the sobriquet "the City of Makers" because it was a city of artisans, craftspeople, tinkerers, enchanters and like-minded folk all sharing one driving motivation: to create clever, innovative, high-end goods of all description. The goods they produced ranged from tableware to jewelry to weapons to sculpture to buildings. There was little that lay beyond the creative capacities of Denandsor's Exalted artisans. The population consisted largely of craftspersons and those who supported them in their creative work. Twilight Solars, No Moon Lunars and even occasional Mountain Folk visitors gathered in Denandsor to design, build and sometimes even sell the fruits of their inspired minds. Any First Age Chosen with an interest in craft likely served an apprenticeship in Denandsor. The factory-cathedrals of Denandsor were hailed as some of the most comprehensive and efficient in Creation, and wealthy Exalts could rent them by the week to create wonders beyond the limitations of their home workshops.

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With a relatively small metropolitan area, Denandsor itself wasn't large enough to hold all the artists and would-be artists who swarmed to the City of Makers in hopes of being apprenticed to a great craftsperson. Outside the city proper were a number of artists' colonies with specialized facilities for specific kinds of crafts. It was possible to find workshops specializing in everything from blown glass to clothing design to the smelting of moonsilver. The industrial arts were well represented in the city. Weapon crafting, though, was slightly underrepresented in Denandsor (as it was over-represented in so many other cities), but many of the most powerful warstriders in Creation were forged here nonetheless.

It is important to note that Denandsor was not an armory. While the city was home to a handful of weaponsmiths, they were members of a pronounced minority. That said, the armor and weapons that were produced in the City of Makers were among the most astonishing ever seen in Creation and were often the favored possessions of the eldest and most powerful Exalted warriors.

The presence of the finest workshops and factory-cathedrals known to the First Age attracted a select and industrious crowd to Denandsor. The city held its artists in high regard and fêted them regularly. The Solar Deliberative held an annual competition in Denandsor to determine the most accomplished Solar, Celestial, Terrestrial and mortal craftsperson in Creation, and even mortal winners of that title were almost certainly assured incredible wealth as the demand for their wares—and the fees they could charge for them—surged. Over the years, this competition resulted in the creation of some of the most powerful, useful, elegant and whimsical wonders ever seen by mortal eyes. Many of these items, the cleverest of them in particular, never left their makers' shops after the competition. Even when their creators saw fit to release their work, these magna opera often remained in Denandsor's many galleries, symbols of the city's prestige.

In particular, jewelry from Denandsor was considered the most beautiful and most cleverly designed in all of Creation. To get a piece from Denandsor, the wealthy elite of Creation would pay a thousand times what they would pay for a ring or a brooch from anywhere else, and with good reason: The quality of crafts from Denandsor was higher than elsewhere, and quite intentionally so. Artisans who did not uphold the city's high standards of craftsmanship were banished before they could bring shame to the city (a practice that resulted in many of the city's worst conflicts, as no artist wanted to suffer the shame of being cast out of the City of Makers).

While Denandsor's Celestial Exalted were engaged in great feats of design and creation, they largely left the governance of the city to their Terrestrial lieutenants (though the hierarchy of the Exalted allowed the Celestial Chosen to reassert their authority at any time). Denandsor's merchant princes, well-situated Terrestrials for the most part, capitalized on the city's reputation as "the workshop of the divine" and did a brisk trade in all manner of metals, gems, tools and crafted goods, particularly among other Terrestrials and the un-Exalted. In truth, much of the wealth generated by the city flowed to the causes of the Twilight Exalted if not directly into their pockets.

The Treasure of Denandsor

Denandsor's enormous library held a respectable trove of general-interest tomes, but its collection on crafts-related texts was unparalleled in Creation. Any topic a craftsman or savant-engineer might be interested in was represented in the extensive aisles and scroll rooms of Denandsor's library. Texts on smelting technology and industrial systems, engineering texts written by Mountain Folk, the Construction Sutras of Autochthon, treatises on plant and crystal technology written by enlightened Dragon King masters, exegeses on the relative strengths and weaknesses of demonic artisans, catalogues of thaumaturgical glyphs, tomes of crafts-related sorcery, catalogues of prayers to mollify technological least gods and so on were the heart of the library's collection.

Like much of the city, the library was built by Twilight Solars as an enormous campus of smaller buildings holding more specialized collections. Denandsor was to crafts and artistry what Sperimin was to more generalized sorcery and thaumaturgical lore.

The Age of Sorrows Begins

In the Second Age, Denandsor's infrastructure remains intact to a startling degree, but the same cannot be said of its industry, its population or even the ghosts of its former residents. Once a thriving metropolis filled with the hiss of molten metal, the thrum of Essence-channeling devices and the clang of hammers, the City of Makers is now silent. Its extensive cooling ponds, kept pristine by old magic, are now perturbed by nothing more than occasional breezes. Its former gardens riot through the streets and take over structures built for men. Trees and weeds grow in its streets and take root where they will, but no animal, no human and no ghost can be found there. The city has spirits, but most are in deep slumber as if enchanted (or cursed), and those that are not quiescent are hostile or utterly alien and incomprehensible.

The precise cause and nature of Denandsor's fall remains a mystery, though vague accounts of its last days can be found alongside other tales of the horrors of the Great Contagion. The few fragmentary accounts of Denandsor's demise can be found in Lookshy and in the archives of the Heptagram.

The fall of the City of Makers took place in the last days of the Shogunate, as the Great Contagion devastated the population of the city. Surviving records suggest that the city's Dragon-Blooded daimyo ransacked the old vaults from the High First Age in a frantic search for an artifact capable of stopping the Contagion. By the end, he was activating any artifact whose function he could not discern, until at last he triggered a reaction he could not control. What this device was and whether the daimyo used the device as it

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was meant to be used or somehow broke it to trigger the effect that cursed his city remains the subject of much debate among certain of the Chosen (mostly Sidereals).

Most savants who know anything of the city's fate believe that the city's daimyo either activated an artifact that had malfunctioned due to age or that he triggered two artifacts in close succession whose powerful enchantments did not mix well. The results were dramatic: Every man, woman and child, Exalted or not, was overcome with fearful hallucinations and went violently insane. The Great Contagion was forgotten as craftsmen murdered their apprentices with hammers and mothers dashed their children's brains out on the nearest stone surface. Nothing could be done to stop the madness, and no one had the presence of mind to even try, as the Great Contagion had already undermined any ability the Shogunate might have had to intervene. A handful of Dragon-Blooded escaped through sheer good fortune to leave the account of Denandsor's demise. Their good fortune was short-lived, however, as they succumbed to the Contagion shortly thereafter.

Theirs was the last account of the inhabitants of the City of Makers. Nothing more was heard from Denandsor after that night.

The Hushed Present

Sometime between the night of Denandsor's fall and the modern day, the curse that afflicts the City of Makers underwent a change of some sort—fading caused by the passage of time, perhaps, or by design of whatever twisted artifacts the daimyo triggered in his shameful panic—but the city remains too blighted even to be haunted.

In the Second Age, the City of Makers is undefended, but apparently impregnable. Even setting foot in the city fills creatures—animal and human, living and dead—with a gut-churning sense of dread. No one willingly stays in the city for more than a few hours. Those forced to stay longer are either driven

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into a catatonic state by the experience, or they disappear amid the ruins. The longer an entity remains in the city, the stronger the sense of anxiety grows until it finally blossoms into an insuperable desire to flee the city at top speed. The sense of dread lingers a while even after the victim is beyond the reach of Denandsor's curse, but extended exposure to the city increases a person's susceptibility to the city's curse and shortens the time it takes to succumb. When questioned afterward about why they fled, would-be plunderers can't or won't say. All they agree on is that, at the moment of their flight, they would rather be *anywhere* than Denandsor.

Scavengers from across Melekin, usually youths who can't believe anything could make *them* feel such fear, occasionally enter the city, ostensibly hunting for relics and treasures. In truth, any plunder they do take from Denandsor is entirely incidental, as the real motive for entering Denandsor these days is to test one's courage against the city's curse. Thus far, the city's curse has won every time, and few who taste that fear ever return for a second helping.

The curse's area of effect covers all of Denandsor proper and much of the surrounding countryside as well. Since only those with the strongest wills can make themselves suffer the horror of Denandsor for any length of time, little of Denandsor proper has been entered even briefly, much less looted. The abandoned artists' colonies around the periphery of the city are near enough to the edges that they have yielded up some few of their treasures, but even they still contain wonders that raiders have not lingered long enough to see, much less seize.

Denandsor proper is another story entirely, and the dangers of making one's way through the city itself are much greater than anything an explorer will encounter on the city's outskirts. Denandsor has magical defenses, complex mechanical traps and an array of functioning (and semi-functioning and malfunctioning) guardian automata. Additionally, raiders must contend with problems of a more mundane (and humbling) nature, such as gaining access to buildings that have no obvious portals of any sort, and whose imperishable materials are extraordinarily resilient to those tools that might be possessed by the denizens of the Age of Sorrows.

The Closed City

Sometime before triggering the device(s) that resulted in the city's curse, the Daimyo of Denandsor (or someone in a similar position of authority) activated the city's magical defense system. Because of its cache of advanced technology and its relative wealth, common wisdom held that the City of Makers was a prime target for raids by hostile daimyos. Therefore, the city's various craftsmen had constructed and put into place a myriad of clever (and often lethal) traps that could be activated should the city ever be threatened. These defensive systems were activated during the Contagion, and the city's manses continue to provide the guardians and traps with power to this day.

The Tombs of the Makers

Unlike most First Age cities, the craftspeople of Denandsor were not content to let others design their tombs after they were dead. It was common for Exalted residents nearing the end of their long spans to design and build their own tombs as a swan song at the end of their long careers. This was a relatively common practice in many First Age cities, but it was de rigueur in Denandsor, and due to the city's high population of craftspeople, Denandsor is known to boast an astonishing collection of *very* cleverly devised tombs and burial vaults. When Denandsor's Dragon-Blooded slew the city's Solars, they were careful to inter the dead in their chosen tombs lest they return as powerful and vengeful hungry ghosts.

Archives from the First Age describe all manner of clever tricks, both magical and otherwise, worked into Denandsor's tombs. One tomb manifests fully in the city only during Calibration. Another burns fiercely day and night without ever being consumed. A third is made of stone that bursts into colorful bloom every winter and loses its flowers every spring.

Although the tombs of Nexus are the best *known* First Age tombs, the tombs of Denandsor exceed those in both variety, engineering and elegance.

The Guardians of Denandsor

The sentinels guarding Denandsor are the most immediately recognizable symbol of the city—or they were in the First Age. In the First Age, the city had a reputation for being home to a variety of Exalted craftsmen and mortal practitioners of thaumaturgy, many of whom saw the creation of automata as the apex of their art, and the city's assorted automata are the greatest remnant of that ethic. During the Dragon-Blooded Shogunate, Denandsor was the only city that refused to destroy or disassemble its population of automata. Many in the city—including the daimyo, apparently—felt that automata, golems and the like were an important part of their city's heritage from the First Age. While a handful of particularly strange or potentially dangerous automata were consigned to a sealed storage vault beneath the city, even they were left intact on the off chance that the craftsmen of Denandsor might again rise to the prominence they held in the First Age and be able to mine the devices for their secrets.

As a result of its unique pro-technology stance, Denandsor relied on automata to keep the peace and protect its citizens right up until the panicked deeds of its daimyo laid the city low.

The devices commonly called the guardians of Denandsor are potent devices. Resembling giant suits of super-heavy plate armor, these automata were loyal defenders of the peace and of the city. They served as the city's police force and as bodyguards for nobles, merchants and valued guests. In testimony to the astonishing engineering techniques of the ancients, many of Denandsor's guardians still function today.

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Denandsor's Miasma

The eerie ruins of Denandsor are afflicted with some manner of curse, and any character approaching closer than five miles from the walls will begin to feel the effects. The blight's area of effect is largely circular, but not perfectly so. It seems to flow out from the center the city along the roads, and characters sticking to the roads will feel the effects of the blight before those who approach from the dense woods that have sprung up around Denandsor. Once one comes within a few miles of the city, however, there is no avoiding the unease that radiates from the once-proud City of Makers. Horses and non-magical mounts stop and refuse to go nearer well before their riders feel anything. Familiars, too, are subject to this effect, but they can *sometimes* overcome their fear out of sheer loyalty. In such cases, roll the character's Familiar Background rating. Failure indicates that the animal will go no farther, though the character may try again the following day. Success allows the beast to go as far as the city's walls, though no farther without some manner of magic.

Denandsor's miasma counts as a form unnatural mental influence that quietly fills those entering the affected area (the city and its outlying areas) with dread and a strong urge to flee.

From the moment a character enters the outskirts of Denandsor to the moment she's entirely clear of the city, she's effectively engaged in social combat with the psychic miasma that permeates the city. (Rules for social combat are on pages **169-175** of **Exalted**.) The taint that hangs over the city is persistent and inescapable, like a ringing in the ears or an ache in the heart. As long as the character remains in the affected area, this effect has an effective dice pool of 15 dice to instill intruders with a sense of dread, despair and horror that makes them want to flee the city. This social combat is a dramatic action. A character wishing to defend against the creeping dread instilled by the Empty City does so with sheer resolve and stubbornness (i.e., Dodge MDV). Parry MDV is inapplicable for defending against the dark suggestions of Denandsor.

Normal mortals and ghosts check their Dodge MDV against the miasma's effects every five minutes. Heroic mortals, God-Bloods and ghosts check every 10 minutes, and Exalted check every 15 minutes.

If the character's Dodge MDV exceeds the number of successes rolled for the city in that check, she successfully fights off the urge to flee. Any time the city's attack exceeds a character's Dodge MDV, the character must either spend a Willpower point or flee the area at top speed. Once the character has been reduced to 0 temporary Willpower, she loses a point of *permanent* Willpower and gains a derangement, but her temporary Willpower pool is refreshed. A character forced against her will to endure the psychological ravages of the city's curse will be reduced to a catatonic husk with a permanent Willpower rating of 0, and should she ever somehow regain a Willpower rating, she'll have one derangement for every point of permanent Willpower she lost to the city's miasma.

As usual, spending Willpower to negate unnatural mental influence causes Exalted to accrue Limit.

The usual penalties to Dodge MDV apply. Arguing or making persuasion attempts while in Denandsor inflicts penalties to Dodge MDV.

Solar (and only Solar) Integrity Charms can render a Lawgiver briefly immune to the effects of Denandsor's psychic assault. Spirit-Maintaining Maneuver renders the Exalt immune to the miasma for 15 minutes. Transcendent Hero's Meditation renders a Solar Exalted immune for 24 hours, though if the Exalt's companion's do not possess this Charm, he'll be forced to discover the wonders of the City of Makers on his own.

The miasma originates in an open vault beneath the daimyo's manse. If characters find their way to the central armory beneath the manse, they'll see the undisturbed bones of the old daimyo surrounded by an array of inscrutable First Age devices—and a contingent of six of Denandsor's guardians.

Adamant Circle Countermagic cast directly on the dissonance engine cancels the enchantment and effectively opens the city up for looting by any oaf with a sword and a wagon.

In the absence of any threat, most of these guardians have put themselves into a state of mechanical sleep or stasis, and they're likely quiescent when first discovered. If they are left unmolested, and if the area they are assigned to guard is likewise left undisturbed, the guardians normally stay in mechanical hibernation. If characters deface or break into buildings, engage in violence or enter the city clad for war, with weapons drawn, the guardians will rouse themselves from their metallic rest.

The specific reactions of Denandsor's guardians depend on the last set of instructions they received. Some will attack immediately, while others will attempt to discern what intruders are doing or to apprehend them. Attacking a guardian or failing to obey its instruction brings swift retaliation as it silently calls its brethren for assistance.

Denandsor Guardian

The vast majority of Denandsor's guardians look like

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overly large, beautifully crafted suits of armor. All of them follow a general theme, but the various artisans who forged the guardians took a great deal of artistic license within that theme.

Attributes: Strength 7, Dexterity 4, Stamina 6; Charisma 1, Manipulation 1, Appearance 4; Perception 5, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Virtues: Automaton: Never fails Valor checks, never makes others

Abilities: Archery 5, Athletics 3–5, Awareness 5, Dodge 6, Integrity 2, Linguistics 2 (Native: Old Realm; Forest-tongue, High Realm), Martial Arts 6, Melee 6 (Sword +2), Presence 1, Resistance 4, Stealth 2–5, War 2–5

Join Battle: 8

Attacks:

Punch: Speed 5, Accuracy 8, Damage 7B, Defense 9, Rate 3

Kick: Speed 5, Accuracy 7, Damage 10B, Defense 5, Rate 2

Clinch: Speed 6, Accuracy 7, Damage 7B, Defense –, Rate 1

Slashing Sword: Speed 4, Accuracy 13, Damage 10L, Defense 12, Rate 3

Firewand: Speed 5, Accuracy 10, Damage 12L, Rate 1, Range 10

Soak: 12L/15B (Armor plating, 9L/9B, Hardness: 7L/3B)

Health Levels: -0/-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Dodge DV: 5 **Willpower:** 10

Other Notes: Denandsor's guardians are adept at using flurries and coordinated attacks to weaken the defenses of their quarry. They were even known for being able to defeat some of the Chosen when necessary.

Styles of Guardians

Throughout the High First Age, it was the tradition in Denandsor for the Solar winner of the city's craft competition to create a new guardian to serve the city. Within basic appearance parameters, the Lawgiver was allowed to innovate and improve upon the capacities of the old design as he saw fit. This poses a significant danger for those attempting to loot the city of Denandsor, as no two guardians can be assumed to share the same (or even similar) capabilities. An intruder who enters combat with a guardian anticipating a hail of shuriken, per past experiences, might well be lethally surprised when the automaton sprays forth a gout of flame instead.

Some guardians look sleeker and more sinuous, while others possess a cruder, more rustic mien. Ironically, it's the sleeker models that are older. The more rustic models were constructed closer to the end of the High First Age when aesthetic tastes had grown tired of sleek lines and moved toward an admiration of a bolder, more primal design. While they look older or more primitive, they actually move more quickly and have more weapons systems then the smoother models.

The Mind of the Guardians

Most of Denandsor's guardians are guided by a central mind unit (a First Age crafted consciousness) located in the vaults beneath Denandsor Manse. Since all sensory signals go through this cognition unit, destroying it effectively shuts down the majority of the city's guardians at once. Neither reaching nor destroying the central mind unit is easy, however. The unit itself resembles a thorny crystal pillar that could easily be mistaken for a piece of exotic First Age art or a weapon in its own right. The cognition device is located behind a thick orichalcum shell with a hardness of 15 and a bashing and lethal soak of 20 each, and it can take 50 health levels of damage before it's destroyed. What's more, even that outer shell is disguised as a stone wall (requiring four or more successes on a [Perception + Awareness] check to detect). The moment the first blow lands on the shell of the central cognition unit, the device emits a silent signal that brings no fewer than 10 guardians to defend it.

Should a character opt to look for a way into the device instead of attempting to damage it, he will likely find one. Touching the disguised wall with the daimyo's seal of authority opens the case immediately. The white jade seal remains where it has been for the last eight centuries or so: on the daimyo's now-weathered lacquered writing desk up in his scriptorium. Other, less honest means of opening the orichalcum casing can be used as well (requiring a minimum of seven successes on an [Intelligence + Larceny] roll to open it without the seal).

Once the shell is open, the central cognition unit is laid bare. Should a character reprogram this central unit, she could turn all of the city's guardians to her defense or assign them to carry out any task she desires as long as they stay within the walls of the city. Reprogramming the central cognition unit entails an extended dramatic action and requires 20 successes on an (Intelligence + Lore) roll, with one roll allowed for every four hours of solid effort. The Savant Background may explicitly be used in association with this roll.

Assorted Automata

While Denandsor's city guardians are the most threatening of the city's animate devices, they are not the only automata remaining in the city. In the First Age, the City of Makers was known for the beautiful and strange array of automata walking its streets. They composed one of Denandsor's many legendary attractions—animate symbols of the magical craftsmanship for which the city was famous.

During the First Age, Denandsor was known as the City of Makers for a reason. Many of the crafting competitions resulted in automata that had been built, not with any task in mind, but only to show off their creator's skill. Many of these myriad golems, androids and assorted sentient sculptures were donated to Denandsor after the competition. The larger and sturdier of these were assigned the task of preserving the peace (working in tandem with the city's official guardians) and serving Denandsor's public. The smaller or more beautiful automata were assigned other civic functions according to

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their design and strengths. Some were sentient assistants aiding the city's Chosen (and might have enough information to give a character a Craft or Lore specialty, at the Storyteller's discretion). Some became public toys (or caretakers) for the city's children, others were animated entertainment pieces, walking the streets as mobile performing sculpture pieces, and still others became monitors, transmitting all that they saw and heard back to the city's Exalted defenders.

In the Second Age, the city's golems and automata are in disarray. Most have long since ceased to be active, but those with built-in Essence collectors might still function just as easily as they did over a millennia ago, although age and erosion might have reduced some of their capabilities—or at least changed their appearance for the worse.

The Treasures of Denandsor

Denandsor didn't lose as much during the Shogunate as many cities did. Its many well-stocked workshops and stocks of components dating back to the Solar Deliberative era allowed it to hold on to the technological dreams of the First Age longer than most cities after the rise of the Shogunate. Accordingly, the city's list of wonders was long and astonishing even by the standards of the First Age. Any non-unique item in **Wonders of the Lost Age** might be found there, for instance. In the Age of Sorrows, the treasures that lay behind the walls, in the treasury and in the storage vaults of Denandsor are beyond measure. Although the city's daimyo triggered many of the old weapons from the High First Age in his panic, a number of them have reset themselves since, and many others were never touched. In the Second Age, few First Age ruins remain as pristine and undisturbed by looters as Denandsor.

More amazing even than the city's collection of First Age artifacts is its collection of workshops and factory-cathedrals. Any Twilight Caste Solar or No Moon Lunar in Creation would find the quality of Denandsor's workshops to be beyond anything they've ever seen. No other factory-cathedrals in Creation, including those in Lookshy and the Heptagram, are so well stocked with tools and components. Some of the Chosen might find themselves having flashbacks to the last incarnation of their Solar or Lunar Essence if that incarnation had the privilege of working in one of the city's grand workshops.

For those interested in design and craft, the workshops of Denandsor are among the most desirable treasure caches in Creation. Those of a more mercenary bent will find that

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even the tools taken from this city can easily fetch a price equal to Resources 5 from either the Realm or Lookshy, the only buyers likely to have the financial wherewithal to pay what they're really worth. Having such devices come on the market, however, would likely result in both states, and no small number of independent parties, launching a major investigation into the source of such powerful artifact tools. The list of those who would be interested in acquiring the tools of Denandsor (or acquiring the city itself) is long and includes many of the most powerful denizens of Creation (and many outside of it), up to and including the First and Forsaken Lion. While the Sidereal Exalted and certain very old Lunars might know the use of some First Age tools, it's likely that only the Chosen of the Sun have the power to use many of them.

The Manse of Denandsor

At the center of Denandsor is the manse once occupied by the city's Solar prince in the High First Age and its daimyo during the Shogunate. A level-5 manse of First Age construction, a successful (Wits + Occult) roll will reveal that this manse was originally Solar aspected but has been refitted to be Earth aspected. Any savant would likely be able to change the aspect back if she so chose, though doing so would likely be a lengthy and difficult undertaking.

As would be expected in a city so fascinated with design and craft, Denandsor Manse is a structure of supreme elegance in flawless harmony with the flow of Essence through the city and the surrounding lands. Its superlative geomantic profile is reflected in the fact that its garden has grown huge and lush since the Contagion, a primeval forest behind walls. Its ponds still contain large, healthy water lilies and thriving populations of koi.

The vaults beneath the manse function in the capacity of both armory and treasury. They open automatically at the touch of the daimyo's jade seal. Otherwise, they require six successes on an (Intelligence + Larceny) roll. Denandsor was a wealthy city right up through its fall, and its treasury vaults—though guarded by more of the city's guardians—are full of jade as well as silver. A character capable of claiming such a treasury will effectively have Resources 5+.

The hearthstone of Denandsor Manse is a rough, round brown stone. Called the Jewel of the True Self, the hearthstone subtracts five successes from all attempts to target its bearer with any manner of Shaping effect.

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IT'S OKAY, I'VE GOT YOU.
HELP!
WHERE'S THE KARMEUS THAT GRABBED ME?
I PUT IT DOWN, DON'T WORRY.
IT CAN'T HURT YOU NOW.
THANKYOUTHANKYOU THANKYOUTHANKYOU...
NOW, IF I CAN JUST FIGURE OUT WHERE IT CAME FROM, MAYBE I CAN FIND THE OTHER MISSING CHILDREN.
LOOK OUT!

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CHAPTER EIGHT
GODS AND MONSTERS OF THE SCAVENGER LANDS

The Emissary of Nexus

The only being in Creation who can truly claim to rival the Empress in power and influence over Creation is probably the Emissary of Nexus. Just as the Empress tamed her nation during the final days of the Contagion, the Emissary too rose up in the dawn of the Second Age to pacify Nexus. And as the Empress lifted up the Realm to be a shining beacon of power to the world, so too did the Emissary make Nexus great. But where the Realm's power stemmed from martial and magical might, the Emissary demanded only one thing from his city: wealth. In so doing, he created a haven for all kinds of trade—and corruption—within Nexus. The Emissary stands at the center of Creation's vast web of commerce. Every road seems to wind its way, at some point, to join Nexus's dirty streets and every trade, no matter how debauched or illicit, lurks beneath the city's grimy veneer. And wherever money changes hands, the Emissary stands quietly behind it, waiting for his due, slowly tugging at the delicate strands of commerce with his decrees and silences, playing the economies of Creation like a puppeteer behind a paper screen.

People who hear tales of him seem surprised when he stands no taller than most mortals in the Scavenger Lands. Yet, his presence fills rooms, for when he speaks, his rolling, baritone voice silences all others. Smooth, flawless white robes whisper about his body as he moves, and long, pale hair falls around the

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featureless silver mask that hides his face. At his side, he carries a long staff of yew, topped with a silver and steel cap that holds twin rubies.

The Emissary does not hold court. Technically, he speaks for the Council of Entities, existing only as their voice. In practice, of course, he is the power behind the Council, and should he choose to speak for the Councilors on a matter they have not decided (or decided in a manner he disagrees with), none object. Still, the Emissary holds his tongue when he is not on official business. Those who attend meetings with the Council sometimes note his presence in the back of the room, watching silently behind the expressionless eyes of his mask, awaiting the decision. When not attending official business, he lingers in the penthouse of the graceful tower where the Council meets, in spacious but sparsely decorated apartments with walls and floors of snowy white and simplistic, ergonomic furnishings. Only books spoil the empty tranquility of his home, with shelves and shelves of them decorating the walls of his library and sleeping chambers, mostly ancient books in the tongue of the Old Realm or ledgers filled with every transaction of Nexus.

But who is the Emissary? What is he like? Most functionaries for the Council describe him as "quiet" or "mysterious," and use a variety of other unhelpful adjectives. He guards his agenda and identity closely and allows none to even glimpse his nature and heart. Rumors abound about him: that he is a monster who murders to maintain his immortality, that he is a benevolent sorcerer come to protect the Scavenger Lands, that he is a new god. The Emissary only nods to such tales, lifting a single, slim finger and murmuring in his deep, authoritative voice that the people of Nexus are certainly inventive storytellers.

Behind the Mask

The exact nature of the Emissary is left entirely in the hands of the Storyteller, for each series has different needs and a secret as juicy as the Emissary's shouldn't be spoiled for any player who cracks the pages of this book. Nor are traits offered, for the needs of a series will vary wildly. Even his gender is left blank, for while most suppose he is male (and this text uses the masculine pronoun when referring to him for the sake of convenience), beneath those voluminous, concealing robes, *he* could easily be a *she*.

For those seeking inspiration, five suggestions of his possible nature are included here. Again, they offer no traits, but some offer some shorthand suggestions for those Storytellers who need a more concrete Emissary for their series.

The Last Solar

Not every Solar perished in the Great Purge. Some hid in secret manses, while others held out in powerful fortresses. One, a powerful sorcerer of the Eclipse Caste, fled from his pursuers and locked himself in a spell that cast him out of time. His escape was complete, and his hunters abandoned the chase, though powerful Sidereals occasionally hunt for traces of him to this day. When the Great Contagion came, it wracked not only the living, but the *Essence* of the world, and the sorcerer's failing spell finally came apart at the seams, casting him into an unpleasant new world. Fearing his hunters would pursue him again, he quickly crafted a mask to hide away his Essence and identity and then set about understanding this new world. Wroth that the Dragon-Blooded had destroyed his once great Realm with their incompetence, he set out to wreak havoc and tear apart the last vestiges of order in Creation. He grasped a nearby city floundering in misery and forged it into the economic capital of the world and then used his influence to slowly ruin the Realm and Creation around it. The resurgence of the Solars gave him pause, however, for suddenly, he had the opportunity to re-create the Old Realm. The millennia within his time-bubble have dimmed his madness somewhat, and he finds letting go of revenge easier than he imagined. But he has yet do decide quite what he wants to do, so he bides his time, plays his games and watches his Solar brethren, wondering if any will recognize him.

Mechanics: The Last Solar has an Essence of 8, with superhuman levels of Bureaucracy, Socialize, Occult, Intelligence and Manipulation. In battle, he relies on delicate, long-forgotten martial arts of the Celestial level and spells of the Solar Circle. As an Eclipse, he has picked up more than a few divine tricks that he can use to throw off those looking for clues to his nature. His mask prevents others from reading his nature or real identity, and even powerful Sidereal magic cannot penetrate it. Using *any* peripheral Essence would damage his disguise, though, thus limiting the amount of Essence he can access. The wounds he took during the Usurpation remain with him to this day, occasionally forcing him to lean on his staff heavily and rest. As a result, he has fewer health levels than one would expect for a being of his power. He has any Solar Charm the Storyteller feels like granting him, including a few Bureaucracy and Socialize Charms that allow him to subtly manipulate entire nations with but a word and an action. He also has the ability to encourage or discourage unrest (if using the Mandate of Heaven rules, he can increase or decrease the Limit of a Dominion by one every action), as well as a perfect defense against negative economic consequences for Nexus. Further, he is a Solar Circle sorcerer with every published spell. He regularly deals with demons, though he is not an infernalist, and he knows spells of which others sorcerers only dream. He would make an excellent mentor for characters, but the removal of his mask would endanger his life to Sidereal hunters who remain as powerful as he once was.

The Resurrected Man

In Creation, the dead can never return to life, but some beings break the laws of Creation with their very existence. Some rules should never be broken, and the Emissary is living proof of this.

Something exists beneath Nexus. The creeping illnesses that plague the city are no natural diseases, but emanations from *it*. When a powerful sorceress lost her lover, she scrambled

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for some way to bring him back, for some way to make the fusion between body and soul complete. The Neverborn beneath Nexus offered its aid, and she foolishly accepted. She destroyed herself after she saw what her magic wrought.

The Emissary is no longer human. He is a puppet upon the fingers of a monstrous, undead god. His mask is the last sliver of his mortal soul, worn upon his face to hide the corruption that flows through his veins. Sometimes, though, even the mask is not enough, and Creation reacts to his presence. The rising plagues, the horrible executions and the deadly events within Nexus are, in fact, byproducts of the Emissary's very presence, loosely directed by his hand as he sloughs off his mounting Underworld taint. Currently, he slowly gathers the threads of commerce into his hands to corrupt the world. His fingers taint any silver that he owns (and his whispers helped encourage the Guild to use silver as its primary currency). The taint encourages the weak-willed to throw away their inhibitions and act cruelly or violently—or, like a necromantic drug, to acquire more tainted silver. The Emissary's blood money slowly poisons the veins of Creation's economies as it pools in magically significant locations, a first step in a patient agenda to drag all of Creation into the Underworld.

Mechanics: The Resurrected Man has an Essence of 9, as well as superhuman levels of Stamina, Intelligence, Perception, Occult, Lore and Larceny. He has a vast variety of powerful Charms at his disposal, similar in nature to Abyssal Charms. He also has powerful Charms that allow him to slay any single mortal in Nexus in a gruesome manner with but the lift of a finger, to taint silver as described and to increase the crime and corruption in any nation whose trade touches upon Nexus. Further, the Resurrected Man is a powerful necromancer, with access to all published necromantic spells up to the Void Circle. The humanity within the Emissary occasionally manages to hold down the waves of necrotic power coursing through him, during which times he locks himself in his room, whispering, writing strange missives or trying to get others to understand what is happening—until his Neverborn master silences him once more.

The Unnamed Maiden

An Age is more than a historical demarcation marked arbitrarily on paper by some savants. It marks the end of the Tapestry of Fate, when the last spools of thread run dry and the pattern spiders sit idle, waiting for the Maiden who will sacrifice herself to form more thread. At the end of each Age, a Maiden dies and a new Maiden is born, waiting for her time and letting the world mark her, so that she may flavor the threads of the next era. That is what the Emissary is—a goddess for an Age yet to come. She sits at the center of Nexus because she *must*. She nests at the center of activity and life in the world, drawing on all experience with wide eyes and silent lips. She watches, whispers and learns. In Nexus, she sees humanity at its purest, its most decadent, its most honest, and she learns what the next Age will bring. Behind her mask, her face holds the shape of the Third Age, already formed, waiting to be revealed. But not even she knows what it looks like, and she will know only when the spiders pull away her mask in those final moments before her destruction and the birth of her child.

Mechanics: The Unnamed Maiden has an Essence of 8, the weakest of the Maidens for she is not yet fully matured. She has superhuman levels of Perception, Dexterity, Charisma, Awareness, Investigation and Stealth. She has any and all godly powers the Storyteller sees fit to grant her, plus powers that allow her to intuitively grasp the shape of the future (but not the past) and to roughly shape events in the present by knowing their outcomes in the future. Still, her revelations, her powers, even her nature, shift from day to day. As the events in the world alter the future for Creation, they alter her as well. In particular, she is drawn to powerful Exalts, for they actively shape fate, rather than passively waiting for it to shape them. The consequences of her premature death are unknown, for no Unnamed Maiden has ever died before her time.

The Scam Artist

The Emissary is precisely what he has always claimed to be: a man who spoke for a council of powerful entities, never a real power in and of himself. The Council cleaned and ruled Nexus in its formative days, merely empowering a figurehead to speak for them to the people. A mortal, they reasoned, would be better equipped for such a role. The duty of Emissary is sacred, and the Council constantly watches for a new candidate when the old one perishes, at which time they imbue the new Emissary with Essence (making him God-Blooded) and teach him their tricks. Nexus is currently on its third Emissary, though he grows old and must be replaced soon.

Mechanics: The Scam Artist has an Essence of 3, with a variety of divine Charms, thaumaturgy and Terrestrial Circle Sorcery. He can match a starting Celestial in power, but do little more.

(**NB:** In various pieces of **Exalted** fiction, the Emissary is portrayed as exceedingly powerful, and the standard assumption is that he is far greater than human. This option exists for those Storytellers who wish to have a lower-key Emissary, one who won't overshadow their characters, should they wish to conquer and control Nexus.)

The Inner Council

The Emissary is not one man, but several. A horrified Sidereal donned the silvery mask when he set out to aid the world in a less indirect manner, using his Charms to defend Nexus directly. A friend helped him, and a young Lunar came across their project and asked to join. Soon, a small cadre of Celestial Exalts governed the city, a secretive council within the Council, taking turns wearing the silver mask as they decided the best course for their city and Creation. The resurgence of the Solars caught them off guard, and they

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discuss among themselves whether they wish to induct a Solar into their ranks.

Mechanics: Each member of the Inner Council has unique traits, but most have Essence scores between 5 and 6, with powerful Charms, sorceries and a few unique tricks up their sleeves. Their exact identity and make-up is left to the Storyteller to decide. Like the Scam Artist, this option creates an Emissary weaker than foregoing sources would suggest, but it exists as a compromise between the first three, more powerful, options and the weaker Scam Artist option.

Spinner of Glorious Tales

Mortals who suffer misfortune and setbacks often comfort themselves with tales of Talespinner's mortal life, for he is proof that even the lowliest mortal can advance to divinity if he's clever and wise enough. Talespinner was a lazy mortal boy who enjoyed stories and constantly sought the horizon. He often told lies to avoid work and responsibility, but as his lies grew more creative, he turned his storytelling into entertainment, and then profit. He delighted in the fantasies his words conjured as he mastered the craft, and the life of the road suited him. According to legend, as Talespinner grew old, he discovered the day of his death from a friendly astrologer and then won passage into Yu-Shan during the Carnival of Meeting. He encountered three different gods in three different parties, and to each, he told a riveting tale that metaphorically centered upon the experiences of the god. (Some extravagant stories claim these gods were the Unconquered Sun, Luna and the Maiden of Journeys, but more modest stories claim Amoth City-Smiter, Ruvia, Captain of the Golden Barque, and the brightest of the Golden Star sisters.) Right before the climax of each story, Talespinner noted the hour, bowed out, and promised to finish the tale the next day. All three came to him the following day, begging to hear the end of their tales, but Talespinner confessed that he was dying, and with but a single breath left, he could only speak the ending of a single story. Hearing this, all three agreed to impart to him a portion of their power, granting him divinity and immortality. Springing from his deathbed with full vitality, he whispered to each how the story ended and capered back into the mortal realm. All the gods were pleased except for Amoth (or the Unconquered Sun, depending on which story you believe), whose story ended badly.

An aura of wanderlust and enchanting mystique hangs around the Spinner of Glorious Tales like a warm, pleasant cloak. His eyes glint with excitement, and his smile draws the interest of men and women alike. He appears in his natural state as a middle-aged mortal man with sun-leathered features, graying hair and travel-worn clothing, but a halo of yellow surrounds his features, clearly marking his divinity. Talespinner is a clever shapeshifter, though, capable of borrowing the form of any traveler, be it that of a poor mendicant, an adventuring prince or even a migratory fish or bird. Yet in whatever form he wears, he wears a set of small trinkets or talismans about his neck or in his hair and his low, pleasing voice crackles with the promise of adventure. He often travels with a rough-hewn walking staff at his side, both as his defense and as support for his weary legs.

Of the three gods of Great Forks, Talespinner spends the least time actually within the city, often traveling the roads to and from his beloved home to visit those places connected to Great Forks. He carries with him the allure of his city, which settles like a spell over the communities he rests in, tempting rebellious or dreamy-eyed youths to find their fortunes in Great Forks. True to his name, he also enjoys a good story and will engage in storytelling contests with those mortals who think they are good enough to best him. Those who win often walk away with a talisman or his staff, but those who lose find the luster in their eyes gone and gray coming to their hair earlier in life.

Sanctum: Talespinner has no specific home within Great Forks, but along any road between Great Forks and a destination, careful searching with spirit-eyes (or All-Encompassing Sorcerer's Sight) might reveal a secret path that leads to a small cottage with a tiled roof and cobbled walls. Copper pots hang from the eaves, and a fire crackles merrily in the hearth. The bed is warm but never slept in, and upon the fire, a pot of ambrosial stew boils that tastes of the memories of home. Talespinner is seldom found here, however. He only enters his home when he is entertaining guests.

Motivation: To inspire Great Forks to greatness.

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 5, Stamina 6; Charisma 5, Manipulation 5, Appearance 3; Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 5

Virtues: Compassion 4, Conviction 2, Temperance 3, Valor 3

Abilities: Athletics 3, Awareness 4, Bureaucracy 1, Craft (Wood) 1, Dodge 4, Integrity 3, Investigation 4, Larceny 3, Linguistics (Native: Old Realm; Others: Forest Tongue, High Realm, Rivertongue, 3 tribal dialects) 4, Lore 3, Martial Arts 1, Medicine 1, Melee 2 (The Dancing Stick +1), Occult 2, Performance 5 (Storytelling +3), Presence 4, Resistance 3 (Travel +3), Ride 2, Stealth 3, Socialize 2, Survival 3, Thrown 1

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Cult 3, Followers 2, Resources 3, Sanctum 1

Spirit Charms:

The Call of Home—Once Talespinner has stepped foot upon a road that will lead him to Great Forks, he may pay 10 motes to instantly arrive in his home city. This Charm

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manifests as Talespinner's walking staff, the Dancing Stick, and he can offer the staff to another, giving up the Charm so that the recipient may use it. Alternatively, a clever thief might steal the staff, gaining the Charm for himself. Finally, Talespinner can spend a day crafting a new staff and imbuing it with the Charm for 15 motes and 1 Willpower and offer it to someone, in which case, Talespinner loses nothing. Regardless of how the recipient gains the Charm, it lasts no longer than a week for him.

The Call of the Horizon—The sparkle in Talespinner's eyes lures youths and world-weary men away from the warmth of their beds and to the hardships of the road, always seeking what lies beyond the next bend. By spending four motes, Talespinner may instill a sense of wanderlust into a target (with a successful Compassion roll). One or two successes inspire the curiosity and restlessness already within the target, but more successes can make even the most hidebound recluse feel the call of the road. Against a Solar with an appropriate Virtue Flaw (at the Storyteller's discretion), use of this Charm can add one Limit per success. Talespinner's sleeping presence sometimes evokes a similar effect, and when Talespinner rests, roll his Compassion when he wakes. Anyone within the house he slept in with less Temperance than the successes rolled feels the call of the road. Those under the effect of this Charm often make their way, at some point, to Great Forks.

Dancing Pathways—For 10 motes and 1 Willpower, Talespinner may tangle the roads and pathways that lead to and from Great Forks. This Charm affects only one traveling character or party and shifts the destination of their chosen road, guiding them either toward Great Forks or away from it. A successful Perception + Awareness roll at a difficulty of 3 is required for a traveler to notice anything has gone awry.

Essence Plethora (x3)—Talespinner has 30 additional motes of Essence in his Essence pool.

Fortunate Misfortune—Talespinner dabbles in the powers of fate and fortune, and some call upon him to turn their luck around, though this often comes at a price. For five motes, Talespinner can convert all of the ones in a roll to successes. He can do this only if his roll suffers a *botch*. He still suffers the effect of the botch, but also "luckily" snatches success from the jaws of failure. He may break his staff or lose his footing, for example, but through sheer fortune, his weapon still strikes home. Talespinner wears small trinkets in his hair, talismans that he can offer to others. By spending 10 motes and giving such a talisman away, Talespinner applies Fortunate Misfortune to the recipient, without further cost. This charm affects a single roll during the story, after which, the talisman is useless. A clever thief can steal a talisman from Talespinner's hair (a suitably daunting task), in which case, the thief must spend five motes or two Willpower to activate it. Talespinner never has more than three talismans in his hair in a single story.

Measure the Wind—Talespinner has an innate sense of the power and capabilities of those nearby, and he treats the knowledge casually.

The Perfect Tale—Talespinner began life as a mortal, during which time he utterly perfected the art of storytelling. This trick allowed him to achieve divinity by impressing the gods of Yu-Shan. By spending 15 motes and one Willpower, Talespinner can extemporaneously craft the ideal story for a target audience. He requires a target from within the audience to "inspire" him, and the story, at least metaphorically, revolves around the target. The Storyteller then makes a (Compassion + Performance) roll for Talespinner at a difficulty based on how "fateful" the target is. A common peasant might be difficulty 5, while a hero whose deeds will be remembered in song and story for generations would be difficulty 1. If the roll is successful, the audience finds the story appealing, entertaining and engaging, regardless of the hostility or difficulty such an audience might normally put forth. The story touches upon the targets' fate, and those who listen carefully can get a glimpse of their future. Talespinner has no direct knowledge of their fate, and any clues gleaned come from his spontaneous story rather than his own knowledge of a character. Further, Talespinner can "nudge" the story, consciously changing the narrative to introduce a slightly altered fate into the target's tapestry. Talespinner can use this Charm as often as he wishes, but the tale he tells about a given target remains essentially the same for the duration of the story. This Charm is rather advanced, and an Eclipse or other character (such as a God-Blood) who wishes to learn this trick might, at the discretion of the Storyteller, need the knowledge of another Charm involving storytelling (such as a Performance Excellency) as a prerequisite.

Principle of Motion—Talespinner has seven extra actions ready in his pool.

Reserve of Will (x2)—Talespinner stores two additional temporary Willpower.

Shapechange—For five motes, Talespinner can change into the form of any creature (mortal or animal) that travels, be it a wandering prince or a migrating bird. The change alters none of Talespinner's traits (though he gains normal abilities based on the animal, such as flight from a bird form), and the change lasts for a scene.

Talespinner has the First, Second and Third Excellencies for the following Abilities: Athletics, Awareness, Dodge, Investigation, Larceny, Stealth, Performance, Presence, Socialize, Survival.

Join Battle: 9

Attacks:

Clever Hand Punch: Speed 4, Accuracy 8, Damage 3B, Defense 5, Rate 3

The Dancing Stick: Speed 5, Accuracy 11, Damage 10B, Defense 6, Rate 2*

* The Dancing Stick quickens the step of the wielder, adding two to his Dodge DV as long as he wields it. Talespinner pays nothing for this, but those who wish to wield it must commit motes to the staff. This value is already included below.

Soak: 6L/12B (Divine resilience, 3L/6B; Hardness: 3L/3B)

Health Levels: -0/-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap

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Dodge DV: 9 **Willpower:** 7 (9 temporary)
Essence: 5 **Essence Pool:** 115
Cost to Materialize: 60
Other Notes: Talespinner is generally encountered alone, but he has cults dedicated to him spread throughout the Scavenger Lands. A bevy of minor road spirits and lesser officials from Great Forks serve him, and those who wish to give him a message can go through those channels.
In general, Talespinner enjoys a match of wits, and those who get caught trying to steal from him in a clever manner will gain his admiration, rather than his enmity.

Weaver of Dreams of Victory

The least understood of the three gods of Great Forks, Dreamweaver never speaks of her origins and only smiles with polite amusement at speculations whispered in her presence. The tribe she brought to Great Forks remembers only that she came first in their dreams, slipping in like a familiar presence to coax and advise. She seemed to coalesce from everyone's expectations, and her encroachment was so subtle that none remember when she took over the reigns of leadership. It simply… happened. And it felt right. Some savants try to probe deeper, to determine what, precisely, she was. Some speculate that she was a turncoat raksha who betrayed her people during the Great Contagion for the love of a mortal child, and so enwrapped herself in the dreams of Creation that she has forgotten what she was. Another popular theory is that she lived in Yu-Shan in an airy palace built of gossamer ambrosia and mortared with hopes. She wrote fanciful dreams for mortals and sent them on the wings of dream flies until she wanted to see the mortals to whom she sent the dreams. When she did, she was appalled by the condition of the world they lived in, so she chose to remain in Creation to help them achieve the splendors of the dreams she imagined for them. But the most popular, yet least spoken, speculation is that she was formed in the mind of Hu Dai Ling, the Shogun of the Crimson Banner. She dreamed and fantasized of a perfect companion, but Dreamweaver wanted the freedom to explore the world, so she tricked Hu Dai Ling into setting her free and flitted away into Creation, hiding in the dreams and hopes of the mortal population.

Dreamweaver materializes less than the other two gods of Great Forks do, preferring to interact with her people through their sleeping minds. When she must manifest, she has no true form that remains consistent from person to person. Instead, she appears as an amalgam of various people the viewer has met in his life. In the same negotiation, one merchant might find her reminiscent of his mother and his wife, but with the eyes of a southern woman he fears and the voice of merchant woman he admires. His companion might describe her as vulpine and sensual, not unlike his sister and a girl he once met but never had the courage to court. She always appears dreamlike and indistinct, with her features flowing and shifting, and she usually, but not always, appears in a feminine aspect.

Dreamweaver believes in Great Forks, and she believes in the united destiny between the three peoples who settled it. Her words soothed the tensions of war between the three when they first met, and her whispers brought them together to fight Princess Magnificent with Lips of Coral and Robes of Black Feathers. Where Talespinner crafts Great Forks grandeur and appeal, and Dayshield offers the city hope and order, Dreamweaver forges a sense of community and connection between its residents and their gods.
Sanctum: Those who travel the dreams of Great Forks might find a palace that belongs to no sleeping mind. A patchwork of fantasies, Dreamweaver's home is at once a part of every dream in Great Forks and a unique whole. Those who enter invariably find just what they expect, whether they understood their expectations or not, and space and time operate on a surreal schedule. The only way to reach Dreamweaver's home is through sleep, careful meditation or the activation of proper spells. Dematerialized beings can slip into the dreams of mortals to find a path to the sanctum in a more mundane fashion.
Motivation: To maintain a sense of community within Great Forks.
Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 6, Stamina 2; Charisma 5, Manipulation 5, Appearance 5; Perception 5, Intelligence 5, Wits 5
Virtues: Compassion 5, Conviction 3, Temperance 4, Valor 2
Abilities: Awareness 4, Craft (Dream) 4, Dodge 3, Integrity 4 (Mercurial Mind +1), Investigation 3 (Empathy +2), Linguistics (Native: Old Realm; Others: High Realm, Rivertongue) 2, Lore 3, Martial Arts 1 (Gentle Touch +2), Medicine 3, Occult 4, Performance 4, Presence 5, Socialize 4 (Social Connections +1), Stealth 2
Backgrounds: Allies 2, Contacts 3, Cult 2, Followers 3, Resources 4, Sanctum 3
Spirit Charms:
Dream-Dancing Quick-Step—When attacked, Dreamweaver can spend five motes and one Willpower to instantly and temporarily dematerialize and avoid the attack completely and perfectly. This Charm has no effect against attacks that strike immaterial targets.
Dream-Walking—When immaterial, Dreamweaver may escape to her sanctum for a cost of 10 motes or enter any nearby dream for 15, where she appears as a suitable denizen to that dream, usually escaping notice unless she wishes to make her presence known.

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Essence Plethora (x5)—Dreamweaver has 50 additional motes of Essence in her Essence pool.

Flowing Features—Dreamweaver's features naturally flow and shift, always appearing to be what her audience expects. She can also control how her visage appears to a degree. By spending five motes, Dreamweaver can adjust her appearance to resonate with figures from her viewer's past. When intimidating a young man, her voice might take on the angry power of his father's fury while her eyes flash like those of a bandit who once stole his money. Were she to seduce him, her whispers might remind him of his first lover, and her eyes might be reminiscent of a girl he met only in his dreams. This Charm inflicts a penalty upon the target's MDV by a value up to her half her Essence (rounded up). This penalty depends on the character's past, for a young Dynast who has never feared anyone in his life might suffer little when she attempts to intimidate him (granting, perhaps, a -1), whereas an orphan who has shivered in fear most of his life might suffer the full penalty. Should an Eclipse Caste Solar learn this Charm, he must pay a total cost of 15 motes to invoke the natural, dreamlike visage that Dreamweaver normally wears before he can manipulate his features more precisely.

Gentle Touch—Dreamweaver's slim, cool fingers inflict little harm on her foes, but her touch can drain their will to fight. If her damage roll comes up with any successes, she may instantly spend three motes after striking a foe, and drain a single point of Willpower instead of dealing damage. She does not gain this Willpower. An Eclipse or God-Blood who learns this Charm uses his own punch traits to activate it, not the Gentle Touch traits given below.

Measure the Wind—Dreamweaver sees past the flesh of those around her, intuitively understanding their nature and power through this Charm.

Principle of Motion—Dreamweaver has nine extra actions ready in her pool.

Sleeping Eyes—For five motes, Dreamweaver can witness the contents of any dream taking place within Great Forks

Sleeping Hands—For 10 motes and one Willpower, Dreamweaver may manipulate the contents of any dream taking place within Great Forks, whether she is a participant in that dream or not. This Charm inflicts no lasting harm upon the target, no matter how awful she makes the dream, but particularly pleasant or unpleasant dreams can offer a penalty or bonus to the target's Conviction roll when he wakes.

Tie-Forging Whispers—By slipping into dreams and manipulating both the ties that surround the target and the dreams he has, Dreamweaver can forge a powerful new connection with events or individuals around him. She can, for example, give a magistrate an intense dream of an innocent maid who works in his palace and then forge a connection between the two so that he realizes that the girl is somehow important to him. This Charm reflects advanced knowledge, and at the Storyteller's discretion, any Eclipse or God-Blood who wishes to learn it must have knowledge of either a dream-manipulation Charm or a fate-manipulation Charm.

Touching Strands—By spending five motes—and the Storyteller making a successful (Compassion + Investigation) roll—Dreamweaver can glimpse the connections inherent between people and events. She might note that two individuals are lovers, or that they should be lovers, or that a boy is deeply tied with a recent war. The difficulty of the roll is based on how obscure or tangled the connections are. This Charm does not perceive the future or the past. It will not reveal that two people once hated one another or that they will eventually, only that they currently do.

Unfolding the Inner Heart—Dreamweaver can reach out and twist a target's mind inside out, so his dreams surround his body, rather than the other way around. This creates a perfect, illusory waking dream that Dreamweaver can manipulate with Sleeping Hands. Any damage inflicted by the dream-illusion isn't real, but death within the waking dream requires a successful (Stamina + Integrity) roll, difficulty 1, or the victim falls into a deep slumber for a number of days equal to Dreamweaver's Essence. The duration of Unfolding the Inner Heart is Instant, but its effects can *seem* to last up to a day for the target. This Charm costs 20 motes and an additional point of Willpower per target. Fair Folk are effectively immune to this Charm, for while the dream-illusion does blossom up around them, they are as capable of manipulating it as they are of manipulating the Wyld. This Charm requires advanced knowledge of dreamcraft, and an Eclipse or God-Blood who wishes to learn it must first have an Essence of 3 and (at the Storyteller's discretion) knowledge of a Charm that manipulates dreams or the Wyld.

Dreamweaver has First, Second and Third Excellencies for the following Abilities: Investigation, Occult, Socialize.

Join Battle: 9

Attacks:

Gentle Touch: Speed 5, Accuracy 10, Damage 1B, Defense 6, Rate 3

Soak: 20L/20B (Dream resilience, 19L/18B; Hardness: 15L/15B)

Health Levels: -0/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Dodge DV: 7 **Willpower:** 9

Essence: 5 **Essence Pool:** 145

Cost to Materialize: 70

Other Notes: Dreamweaver's high soak and hardness comes from the difficulty of harming a dream. However, if she takes damage, she quickly flees and goes immaterial. She prefers not to fight.

Dreamweaver has a small army of dream flies at her disposal, which serve in her palace, play court with her guests or flit about Great Forks, dispensing the dreams she requires of them.

Shield of a Different Day

The First Age was a more elegant time, one in which a warrior could battle peacefully and the mere presence of a soldier was enough to move nations. Dayshield once worked

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in Yu-Shan, serving in the Division of Battles for the Bureau of Battles as an agent covering all matters of peaceful war, battles that consisted of nothing but positioning and war-through-diplomacy. When the Solars fell, however, her portfolio of cases diminished, and her superiors shifted her to less savory duties. With the fall of the Shogunate, peaceful warfare evaporated completely, and rather than involve herself more deeply with the corruption seeping into her division, she stole some files for insurance and fled Yu-Shan to seek a new fortune for herself in the mortal realm of Creation. Her time in the cruel, harsh world of the Second Age changed her, and her gentle ways and elegant uniform gave way to cold armor and sharpened steel, though she retains her protective instincts and civil manners.

Dayshield often walks the streets of Great Forks in material form, her presence comforting those around her. For a goddess of war, she is strikingly beautiful, with the soft curves of the woman each soldier dreams about returning to. Long tresses of raven hair fall around handsome features, and granite-colored eyes gaze upon her soldiers proudly, the eyes of a sergeant who has trained her soldiers well. When she speaks, her alto voice rolls across the masses with a patriotic tenor, inspiring hope in those who hear her. Her armor is clean and polished, and her shield gleams in the sunlight. Those who stand behind her feel a wellspring of confidence, knowing they will see the morning's dawn.

Dayshield focuses primarily on the defense of Great Forks, and she is the most practical of the city's three gods. Her soldiers police the city and see to its defenses, but her training doesn't prepare them for battle nearly as much as it prepares them for the positioning of war and peacetime garrison duty. Both she and her soldiers prefer peacekeeping operations or taking care of civilians in emergencies. Conquest suits them poorly. When battle is required, she usually takes the field in material form, protecting her vulnerable, young soldiers behind her vast, impenetrable shield and doing all she can to make sure they will return home to their lovers and families.

Sanctum: Dayshield often works in the Palace of the Three in material form. Her sanctum lies atop and within its Council Hall, appearing as an aging, out-of-date fortress filled with old and new knickknacks and trinkets side-by-side. To get there, one need only shut a door within the Council Hall offices, open it once more and step through as an immaterial being.

Motivation: To defend and maintain Great Forks.

Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 4, Stamina 5; Charisma 5, Manipulation 4, Appearance 4; Perception 3, Intelligence 5, Wits 4

Virtues: Compassion 3, Conviction 4, Temperance 3, Valor 4

Abilities: Archery 4, Athletics 2, Awareness 2, Bureaucracy 4 (Logistics +1), Dodge 4, Integrity 4, Linguistics (Native: Old Realm; Others: High Realm, Rivertongue) 2, Lore 2, Martial Arts 3, Medicine 2, Melee 5, Occult 1, Performance 2, Presence 3, Resistance 3, Ride 2, Socialize 3 (Wartime Negotiations +2), Survival 3, Thrown 3, War 5 (Defensive Warfare +3)

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Cult 1, Followers 4, Resources 4, Sanctum 2

Spirit Charms:

Dissolution of Battle—By spending 30 motes and three Willpower, Dayshield can bring a battle to an end. Morale slips, soldiers tire, the weather changes, and by unvoiced agreement, the battle simply ends. She may not activate this Charm before the battle has begun to favor one side or another (Storyteller's discretion), and it does not change the outcome of the battle, only ends it more swiftly and with less loss of life. Dayshield can activate this Charm while immaterial.

Dove Conquers Hawk Approach—Dayshield once governed peaceful warfare, where the maneuvering of soldiers and clever diplomacy garnered territory and conquered peoples. By spending 10 motes, Dayshield may (if the Storyteller uses the optional Mandate of Heaven rules) substitute her region's Government or Culture trait for Military for the purpose of rolls involving the keywords: At War. Her nation need not be at war with her opposing nation (thus ignoring the needs of the keyword), but it must have a Military trait that matches the requirements of the action (as one still needs the soldiers to properly intimidate a foe). This magic no longer works in Creation, however. The fabric of war has changed a great deal since the fall of the Lawgivers, and this Charm is but a relic in Dayshield's arsenal, a sign of what she once was.

Essence Plethora (x3)—Dayshield has 30 additional motes of Essence in her Essence pool.

Insurmountable Defense—When Dayshield deploys her shield (from which she gains her namesake) in the defense of another, she may spend five motes and one Willpower to make the parry a perfect one. It cannot fail to defend. She can deploy this Charm only if she is defending another, and the magic is actually tied up in her shield. She may give the shield away to another, in which case he may use the Charm (and she may not), or the shield can be stolen, offering similar results. Either way, the shield returns to her after a week's time. She may also manifest this Charm in mass combat, in which case, the shield defends an entire unit (one she is leading). Doing so will even defend against attacks that cannot be reasonably parried, such as shunting aside an artillery barrage. She may use this Charm in mass combat while immaterial, in which case it manifests as fortune and favor protecting a single unit.

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Measure the Wind—Dayshield remains constantly alert for tactical threats, gauging her opponents and guests with this Charm.
Principle of Motion—Dayshield has seven extra actions ready in her pool.
Reserve of Will (x3)—Dayshield stores three additional temporary Willpower.
Tomorrow's Victory—Dayshield knows that defeat today can lead to victory tomorrow, and she offers up hope to her troops when morale ebbs. When Dayshield has battled a foe and, at the Storyteller's discretion, lost (or drawn) the battle, she may commit five motes. The next time she battles the same opponent, she may release the Essence she committed and gain +1 success to her attack rolls for the duration of the battle. If she chooses, she may keep her Essence committed and, if she loses again, commit another five to "stack" the bonuses for a future fight. She may have no more than five (equal to her Essence) instances of this Charm "stacked" at any one time. This Charm may also apply to mass combat, in which case, it applies to her entire unit, but only if the unit lost a previous battle against the enemy it currently fights.
Dayshield has the First, Second and Third Excellencies for the following Abilities: Archery, Bureaucracy, Dodge, Integrity, Melee, Presence, Resistance, Socialize, War.
Join Battle: 6
Attacks:
Defender Fist Crush: Speed 4, Accuracy 8, Damage 6B, Defense 7*, Rate 3
Broken Dawn Lance: Speed 5, Accuracy 12, Damage 12L, Defense 9*, Rate 3
Bright Star Arrow: Speed 6, Accuracy 9, Damage 11, Range 350, Rate 2
* Dayshield's unbreakable shield grants her +2 to all of her Parry DVs. This bonus is included in the Defense Values.
Soak: 10L/20B (Brilliant armor, 7L/15B; Hardness: 6L/6B)
Health Levels: -0/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap
Dodge DV: 7 **Willpower:** 9 (12 temporary)
Essence: 5 **Essence Pool:** 125
Cost to Materialize: 70
Other Notes: None

Tu Yu, City Father of Deheleshen

The god of Deheleshen is old. Wrinkles line his aristocratic features, and dust riddles his exquisite, if out-of-date, robes. Surprisingly tall, he always stands one head taller than any other Lookshy citizen he entertains, and even Tien Yu fails to measure up to his height. A sophisticated rattle issues forth from his dry lips when he quietly regales his audience with grand tales of a more elegant time. His mannerisms are archaic but charming, and a small gesture, well-timed joke or delightful anecdote quickly sets anyone at ease.

He's also quite mad. Heir to a forgotten time, he is a relic, a god of a city that no longer meaningfully exists. He writes furious letters to Yu-Shan officials who no longer hold office, holds court in empty rooms and sends gifts to long dead officers of the Seventh Legion. He expects people to behave in a manner they once did and is continually shocked when they fail to live up to, or even understand, his expectations. Still, the eccentric old god keeps to himself, shuffling around the Old City in insubstantial form, just a dusty breeze that rustles past pedestrians.

Yet, old Tu Yu loves his city dearly, even though he understands on some level that it is no longer truly his. He cannot guard its present, but he ruthlessly guards its past. Those who seek to dig up secrets best left buried quickly face his wrath, and those who have investigated too closely into the Gunzota Incident, the actual events surrounding Lookshy's rejection of the Scarlet Empress's power or some of the pre-Contagion scandals that marred Deheleshen sometimes vanish. The last thing they see is Tu Yu's mad, yellow-toothed smile, and their corpses are discovered later in forgotten catacombs beneath the Old City.
Sanctum: Tu Yu's sanctum spreads all across the Old City as one of the larger sanctums in the Scavenger Lands. His primary abode looks completely unchanged from what it was millennia ago, though much of the food and furniture has a shiny, plastic quality to it. Outside of his fine palace, the rest of his sanctum shows Deheleshen exactly as it was the day before the Great Contagion changed it forever, but everything is two dimensional and rough, as though drawn on paper boards and moving about, carnival-like, for Tu Yu's amusement. He invites a few guests to his sanctum, particularly Tien Yu, and most find it a charming reminder of days gone past. Tien Yu, in particular, values her time there.
Motivation: To protect the legacy of Deheleshen (and by extension, Lookshy).
Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4; Charisma 6, Manipulation 5, Appearance 2; Perception 4, Intelligence 6, Wits 5
Virtues: Compassion 3, Conviction 4, Temperance 3, Valor 3
Abilities: Archery 1, Awareness 3, Bureaucracy 4 (Conspiracy +2), Craft (Air) 1 (Calligraphy +3), Dodge 2, Integrity 5, Investigation 4, Linguistics (Native: Old Realm; Others: High Realm) 1, Lore 3 (Shogunate Era Lore +3), Martial Arts 4, Melee 2, Occult 3, Performance 4, Presence 5, Socialize 6, Survival 2, War 5 (Shogunate Tactics +3)
Backgrounds: Cult 2, Followers 3, Influence 3, Resources 3, Sanctum 3

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Spirit Charms:
Charming Patriotic Forgiveness Technique—Tu Yu can disarm those who express worries or fears over Lookshy's present or past with a delightful anecdote or clever play on words. After the Storyteller gains more successes on a Presence or Socialize roll than the target's Conviction, Tu Yu may reflexively spend 15 motes and one Willpower to dull the memory of what worried the target in the first place, replacing the concern with happier images of Lookshy's past and future. A young woman concerned by the disappearance of her brother, for example, might walk away with a sudden confidence in the Lookshy police to investigate the matter thoroughly, her concern over the exact circumstances surrounding his absence fading. Players who want their characters to resist the effects may spend a Willpower point for their characters to momentarily remember their original concern. After spending a number of Willpower points equal to the total extra successes Tu Yu rolled on his Presence or Socialize roll, the effect is countered permanently. Tu Yu can use this Charm while immaterial, but he must rely upon the successes of another who verbally defends Lookshy against the target. Tu Yu may activate this Charm in conjunction with a Presence or Socialize Excellency.
Essence Plethora (x2)—Tu Yu has 20 additional motes of Essence in his Essence Pool… a rather small total, but Tu Yu has fallen far from his glory days.
Hurry Home—Tu Yu always has one foot in Deheleshen. Sometimes, when he walks, the streets around him slowly, subtly change until he is once more in the Old City of Lookshy. He does this without meaning to, at times, and can take a traveling companion with him (much to her chagrin).
Measure the Wind—Tu Yu knows who his guests and company are, even if he doesn't necessarily understand what he knows. When he first meets a Dragon-Blood, he might mistake her for a long-dead ancestor; Sidereals register as servants and functionaries; and the presence of a Solar can drive him into fury and fear, as he mistakes them for long-dead overlords.
Nostalgia Imparting Blessing—For 20 motes and one **permanent** Willpower (the Willpower point will return to Tu Yu after a few years, but regardless, he uses this Charm sparingly), Tu Yu can empower someone with the same concerns for the past that he has. The target gains a permanent dot of Essence and, for mortals, they become God-Blooded attuned to Tu Yu, often gaining streaks of white in their hair, a scent of dust around them and an elegant taste for bygone fashions and foods. The target also permanently changes a mortal's Motivation to match Tu Yu's. Tu Yu can speak to his "helpers" even when he's immaterial, and he can spend three motes to send them impressions and needs even when he's not in their presence. For five motes, he can issue commands that control the "helper," who must spend a point of Willpower to resist the command. This Charm cannot be used upon unwilling targets *unless* Tu Yu spends 10 additional motes. The target's endowment and change are suppressed, and the character behaves normally, but Tu Yu may spend 10 motes at any time to "activate" the "sleeper." When he does so, the unwitting target's Motivation changes, and she may be commanded and manipulated just as any other helper. Such a change can happen only at night and ends when the sun rises. The very fact that Tu Yu uses this Charm on mortals is a grave offense in heaven, and he would suffer great punishment if discovered. An Eclipse who learns this Charm may use it on himself or others, but they become beholden to Tu Yu, not to the Eclipse.
Principle of Motion—Tu Yu has seven extra actions ready in his pool.
Reserve of Will (x3)—Tu Yu stores three additional temporary Willpower.
Watchdog of Former Glory Method—Whenever Lookshy is threatened, Tu Yu reflexively and automatically spends three motes to become aware of that danger. This Charm works only if the danger comes from Lookshy's *past*, however. If some aspect to Lookshy's legacy threatens it today, such as an exposé on the Gunzota Incident that endangers Lookshy's stability, Tu Yu knows about it. But if some new threat rises against Lookshy, such as a criminal Lintha subversion, it slides past Tu Yu's notice.
Whispers Behind the Page Meditation—Tu Yu pens a letter in fine, flowing Old Realm and then spends six motes and one Willpower to infuse some publication in Lookshy, whether it is a propaganda brochure or a recent book, with hidden meaning. Anyone marked with Nostalgia Imparting Blessing immediately receives the message (whether she knows it or not), as well as anyone Tu Yu specifically targets as a recipient. A (Perception + Linguistics) roll, difficulty 5, will uncover the secret code. Tu Yu can also use Charming Patriotic Forgiveness Technique with this Charm, though in this case, the Storyteller must roll Tu Yu's (Wits + Craft [Air]), relying upon the beauty of his message to dull the fears of the past.
Tu Yu has the First, Second and Third Excellencies for the following Abilities: Bureaucracy, Lore, Martial Arts, Presence, Socialize, War.
Join Battle: 8
Attacks:
Punch: Speed 5, Accuracy 9, Damage 4B, Defense 10, Rate 3
Kick: Speed 5, Accuracy 8, Damage 7B, Defense 6, Rate 2
Clinch: Speed 6, Accuracy 8, Damage 4B, Defense –, Rate 1
Soak: 8L/10B (Stubborn defense, 6L/6B; Hardness: 8L/8B)
Health Levels: -0/-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap
Dodge DV: 5 **Willpower:** 7 (10 temporary)
Essence: 4 **Essence Pool:** 95
Cost to Materialize: 55
Other Notes: Tu Yu generally remains insubstantial but spends more time in Lookshy than Tien Yu does. His Cult Background reflects the reverence Lookshy still offers him (though not outright worship), and his Followers Background reflects the band of co-conspirators and sleepers he has assembled over the years with Nostalgia Imparting Blessing. Storytellers should note his insanity, and while he is quite skilled in War and Bureaucracy, the solutions he offers are often impractical by today's technology.

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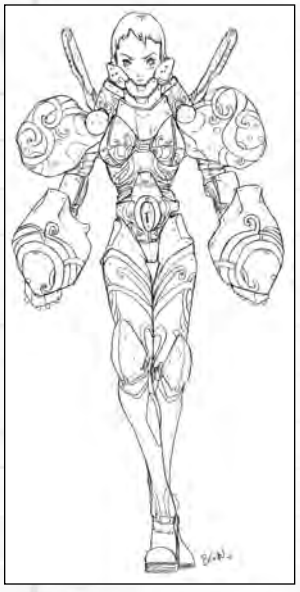
Tien Yu, Goddess of Lookshy and the Seventh Legion

When the Great Contagion threatened to consume all of Creation, Deheleshen should have died like every other city in the Shogunate, and Tu Yu should have faded with it. Instead, as he staggered through the dying streets of his city, he bowled over and vomited up blood and a god-child. To her, he cried, "Protect me, protect my city." She looked up at him and nodded. He took the strength of Deheleshen's walls and forged her armor. He took the steel of her people and crafted it into weapons. Then he fell asleep behind her as she stood watch over his city and became its new guardian.

Or so goes but one of many stories of Tien Yu's birth. Others whisper that she sprung from an illicit encounter between Tu Yu and a handmaiden of Luna, or even the God of the Imperial Mountain and Luna herself. Whatever her origin, she is young for a goddess and powerful for her age.

When she bothers to manifest, she appears as a beautiful Lookshy legionnaire, with pale green eyes peering out from behind the tall collar of her moonsilver-laced black jade dragon armor. Her skin glimmers with the color of night, and her short silken hair gleams a metallic hue of silver. Centuries ago, she lost her voice and regained it only 50 years ago, and she sometimes forgets that she can speak over a whisper. But she loves to sing, often entertaining her father/lover/sibling, Tu Yu, with her voice. She prefers an immaterial state though, and most Lookshy soldiers describe her less as a being and more as a presence that fills their spirits and quickens their step, the "fire of Tien Yu."



She usually remains in Yu-Shan, acting as an advocate for her city and advising Sunipa, the Eastern goddess of war. She regularly bests the Central god of war in practicing duels, much to his disgrace, and some feel she is too powerful for her station, but she dutifully obeys Sunipa's words, so she is shielded from bureaucratic censure. When she comes to her city, she enjoys the company of soldiers, watching them quietly and invisibly. When one catches her attention, she may bed him for a night—but never twice—and passes off the results of such unions as orphan Dragon-Blooded, quietly brought into Lookshy's care.

Sanctum: Tien Yu resides in a minor mansion in Yu-Shan, an exceedingly modern establishment riddled with relics she has collected from Tu Yu. When in Lookshy, she bunks in Tu Yu's sanctum, listening to his stories or sharing his bed.

Motivation: To maintain Lookshy and the Seventh Legion.

Attributes: Strength 7, Dexterity 7, Stamina 10; Charisma 6, Manipulation 3, Appearance 4; Perception 4, Intelligence 5, Wits 4

Virtues: Compassion 2, Conviction 4, Temperance 3, Valor 4

Abilities: Archery 5, Athletics 2, Awareness 3, Bureaucracy 4, Craft (Magitech) 3, Dodge 4, Integrity 5, Investigation 3 (Internal Affairs +1), Linguistics (Native: Old Realm; Others: High Realm, Low Realm, Rivertongue) 3, Lore 3 (Shogunate Era Lore +2), Martial Arts 6, Medicine 2 (Battlefield Medicine +1), Melee 6, Occult 3, Performance 3, Presence 4, Resistance 3, Ride 2, Sail 2, Socialize 3, Survival 2, War 6

Backgrounds: Allies 1, Cult 3, Influence 2, Resources 4, Sanctum 3

Spirit Charms:

Lookshy cannot last forever, so fate has decreed. The pattern spiders have already woven the fall of Lookshy, and Tien Yu has seen it. She knows Lookshy's days are numbered. Many of Tien Yu's more powerful Charms erode Lookshy's remaining time, just as every battle Lookshy engages in erodes its arsenals. Therefore, she uses these Charms sparingly. Any Eclipse Solars or God-Bloods who learn these Charms and use them also erode Lookshy's remaining fate.

All-Seeing Battle-Eyes—For 10 motes and one Willpower, Tien Yu gains perfect knowledge of the battlefield on which she stands. This knowledge affects only a single combat, whether mass combat or personal, and lasts for a single scene. In addition to an intuitive understanding of troop strength and positioning, her knowledge of the battlefield prevents surprise attacks and increases her defensive capabilities. While this Charm is in effect, Tien Yu ignores the onslaught penalty to her Defense Value and may apply her Defense Value even against surprise attacks. Manifesting this Charm costs Lookshy a single day of fate.

Essence Plethora (x6)—Tien Yu has 60 additional motes of Essence in her Essence pool.

The Fire of Tien Yu—Tien Yu does not possess individuals. She possesses *units* of men. For a cost of 15 motes and two Willpower, Tien Yu enters the bodies of an entire unit of Lookshy soldiers. Those soldiers feel a sudden surge of joy and serenity within their hearts, a certainty of victory. The unit immediately gains Perfect Morale and a +1 bonus to Might. Further, Tien Yu may manifest any of her Charms to aid the unit, as though she was a manifest sorcerer within its ranks. Finally, this Charm represents a real danger to Tien Yu, for as the soldiers die or flee, she weakens. Every loss of Magnitude to the unit inflicts the previous Magnitude value in unsoakable lethal health levels of damage to Tien Yu. (For example, if a unit fell from Magnitude 5 to 4 while possessed by Tien Yu, she would take five health levels of lethal damage.)

Hurry Home—When Lookshy needs her, Tien Yu can enter the city at a moment's notice, but only once per day.

Impenetrable Shogunate Mantle—Tien Yu spends 10 motes and calls upon the power of Lookshy's arsenals. Her armor shifts and changes, growing more mechanical, gleaming with power as it expands. When the Charm finishes manifesting, she is shrouded in divine, nigh-impenetrable dragon armor that increases her capacity for battle. While wearing the Impenetrable Shogunate

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Mantle, Tien Yu increases her lethal and bashing soak by 10 and her hardness by 10. Further, she adds two dice to all attack and damage rolls and increases her Parry DV by one. This Charm lasts for one scene and reduces Lookshy's fate by one day. An Eclipse Caste or God-Blood who learns this Charm must don armor before he can use the effects of the Charm.

Lance of a Fallen Era—Tien Yu summons the total power of the collected Lookshy arsenal into a single, annihilating blast of destruction. A brilliant, white-hot lance of fire erupts from her hands and destroys her target. She spends one mote per die of damage, to a maximum of 50 or her target's total health levels, whichever is **more**, and she chooses whether the damage will be lethal or aggravated. The Storyteller rolls (Dexterity + Archery) for Tien Yu to strike her target, adding a number of successes to the attack equal to her Essence. For lethal damage, each success on the damage roll (i.e., each health level of damage dealt) costs Lookshy a single day of fate. For aggravated damage, *each damage die* (before soak) costs Lookshy a single day of fate. The maximum range on the attack is one mile. Tien Yu can manifest this Charm in mass combat as a unit-busting blast, in which case, she pays two motes per die, and inflicts two damage to the unit per success. The costs to Lookshy's fate remain the same (and note that lethal damage subtracts one day **per success**, not per damage inflicted). At the Storyteller's discretion, all Magnitude destroyed through the use of this Charm reflects dead soldiers, rather than merely wounded or fleeing soldiers. God-Bloods or Solars of the Eclipse Caste may learn this Charm, but it represents advanced knowledge and power, and the Storyteller might require that the character already have learned another of Tien Yu's Charms, or some massive Essence discharge Charm, and have an Essence of (at least) 3.

Legion of One—For a cost of eight motes per action, Tien Yu summons up shadows of every legion that has ever served her. Dark, dragon-armor-clad soldiers appear from the shadows to stand by her side. This Charm manifests in two ways. In personal combat, she manifests a number of shadows equal to her Essence, all of which have traits identical to hers except they have only three health levels and follow the rules of extras. Each has one action. In mass combat, she manifests far, far more soldiers, though each is less capable. Tien Yu gains a unit of elite extras with a Magnitude equal to her Essence, perfect Morale, a Drill of 5 and a Might of 1. This Charm reduces Lookshy's remaining days by one for every scene used.

Measure the Wind—Using this Charm, Tien Yu scans the capacity of her foes and guests with a glance.

Principle of Motion—Tien Yu has 10 extra actions ready in her pool.

Tien Yu has the First, Second and Third Excellencies for the following Abilities: Archery, Dodge, Integrity, Melee, Martial Arts, Presence, Resistance, War.

Join Battle: 7

Attacks:

Gauntlet Strike: Speed 5, Accuracy 13, Damage 14B/20L*, Defense 7, Rate 2/1*

Reaper Daiklave (Unadorned Razor): Speed 4, Accuracy 18, Damage 13L, Defense 8, Rate 3

Long Powerbow (Rain-of-Honor): Speed 6, Accuracy 15, Damage 14L, Range 500, Rate 1

* By spending three motes, Tien Yu may "supercharge" her gauntlets with Essence for a single action, using the traits after the slash.

Soak: 25L/25B (Armor of Lookshy, 20L/15B; Hardness: 20L/20B)

Health Levels: -0/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Dodge DV: 9 **Willpower:** 10

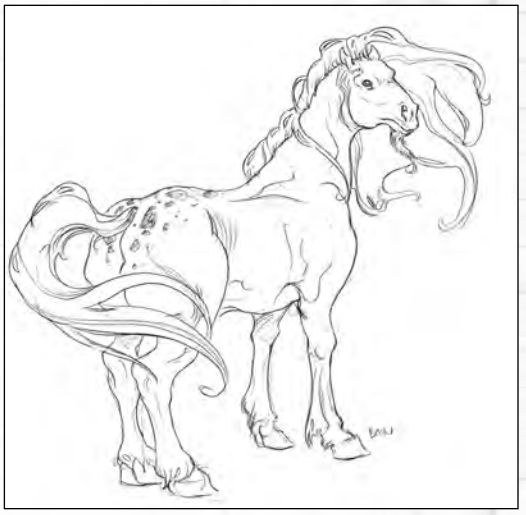
Essence: 6 **Essence Pool:** 170

Cost to Materialize: 80

Other Notes: Tien Yu seldom battles beside the Seventh Legion. Not only does she fear what her Charms will do to the city, but she respects her soldiers' independence and assiduously follows the path of the Immaculate Order—which states that it is not her place to interfere with Creation. She aids her city in a manner that is proper: from the bureaucracies of Yu-Shan. Still, quite a cult has popped up around her, and many soldiers include icons of her in their Immaculate shrines. Chaplains frown on this, but as each man's worship is his own, they do little to stop it… one of the facts that infuriates the Immaculates of the Realm.

Hiparkes, Stallion-Lord of the Marukan Plains

When the world was young and the horizons farther than they are today, the Maiden of Journeys rode a storm-dappled steed who could cross Creation in less than a day. But as the years wore on, the steed found himself resting in his stables more and more, yearning for the freedom of the open plains, until he was forgotten in a spirit stable in Creation. When the Great Contagion struck, more than just the mortal realm was harmed, and the steed found himself maddened and wild, racing the plains of the Scavenger Lands until a young girl from the Marukan tribe rode upon his back and reminded him of who and what he was.



Hiparkes takes many forms. When he manifests as a human, he appears as a towering, silver-skinned man with a thick mane of smoky black hair. In his right hand, he bears a lance, and in his left, he bears a bow. Riding leathers adorn his legs, and he leaves

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his powerful chest bare. Sometimes, he appears as a herd of wild horses led by a single stallion, and except for the stallion, one cannot tell where one horse ends and the next begins. His favored form, however, is that of a massive horse 16 hands high with a cloud-gray dappled hide and a thick mane of silvery hair. In whatever form he takes, his low voice rumbles like a thousand pounding hoof-beats, and his large liquid eyes hold wisdom, compassion and pride.

Hiparkes governs horses and their riders, ruling over the unity between steed and man. Therefore, his interests go far beyond the wild herds of horses that roam the Marukan plains and delve into the very cities of his favored people. Any horse who serves his master well has a place in Hiparkes' heavenly stables, and any mortal who treats his steed well earns the horse god's respect. Pubescent children earn special kindness from Hiparkes, who will freely allow them to ride upon his back if he finds them lost in the wild, bringing them home to their parents.

Sanctum: Hiparkes rests in a ranch that lies at the end of the secret paths wild horses sometimes tread. Dedicated mortals occasionally find their way to this equestrian heaven by following herds of horses into narrow gullies that seem to dead-end. Hiparkes' ranch rests upon a vast field of green hills where horses run freely. Stables that stretch for miles house the most virtuous of steeds, those horses who have proven themselves loyal to their riders and worthy of Hiparkes' hospitality. Within the ranch, Hiparkes dines with his guests, a myriad of mortals and the ghosts of worthy riders who have won Hiparkes' respect. Occasionally, if a supplicant proves himself, Hiparkes may gift him with a legendary horse or a place at his table.

Motivation: To perfect the horses and riders of Marukan.

Attributes: Strength 6, Dexterity 5, Stamina 6; Charisma 5, Manipulation 3, Appearance 5; Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Virtues: Compassion 3, Conviction 3, Temperance 2, Valor 4

Abilities: Archery 4, Athletics 4, Awareness 3, Bureaucracy 1, Craft (Water) 2, Dodge 3, Integrity 3, Linguistics (Native: Old Realm; Others: Rivertongue, 3 various tribal tongues) 2, Lore 1, Martial Arts 3, Medicine 3 (Veterinary Arts +2), Melee 4, Performance 2, Presence 5, Resistance 5 (Long Journeys +1), Ride 5 (Being Ridden +3), Socialize 3, Survival 2, War 4

Backgrounds: Cult 3, Followers 5, Resources 5, Sanctum 5

Spirit Charms:

The Barbs of Hiparkes—A blow from Hiparkes' lance or arrows can permanently cripple a horse or temporarily cripple a mortal. Once Hiparkes has struck his target, he may spend six motes to instantly inflict a *crippling* wound. The wound always cripples a leg. Mortals will heal the wound naturally after a week, while horses suffer the affliction permanently (unless healed through surgery or magic—the permanence is not magical in nature). The Charm resides within Hiparkes' lance and arrows, so Hiparkes may give away his lance (and thus the Charm) or it may be stolen from him. In either case, the lance returns to him in a week. The arrows may be offered to another for a cost of 10 motes, which grants three arrows (i.e., three uses of the Charm). A thief may take them but must pay 10 motes to fully empower the arrows. Hiparkes retains the Charm after giving away (or losing) arrows. Hiparkes must be material to use his lance, but he can strike horses with his arrows while he is immaterial. This Charm does not affect Exalts or other beings that cannot be maimed easily

Essence Plethora (x5)—Hiparkes has 50 additional motes of Essence in his Essence pool.

Hurry Home—Hiparkes may appear anywhere in the Marukan plains once per scene.

The Kiss of Hiparkes—By spending 15 motes and one Willpower, Hiparkes marks a target. The mark is invisible, but those with the ability to see the insubstantial note a primal tattooing upon the target's skin. Gods (or anyone with Measure the Wind or similar Charms) will intuitively understand that the target "belongs with" Hiparkes and that Hiparkes will guard him. This Charm does more than just mark a target, however. It also creates a bond between rider and steed, and instantly grants a single dot of the Familiar Background to the target. The Familiar is always a horse, and if the character has no horse, fate will make sure that he will discover his steed. This mark is permanent (unless somehow destroyed) and can be granted to only a willing target, and many in Marukan beseech Hiparkes for the Kiss. Hiparkes may grant his blessing while immaterial.

Measure the Wind—Hiparkes' dark, liquid eyes and wide nostrils instantly sense the power and nature of a being he meets.

Principle of Motion—Hiparkes has eight extra actions ready in his pool.

Reserve of Will (x2)—Hiparkes stores two additional temporary Willpower.

The Scourge of Hiparkes—For 10 motes, Hiparkes may level a curse upon those who treat their loyal animals cruelly. This curse appears as an insubstantial mark, invisible to mortal eyes, but the savage, barbed tattoo appears clearly to those with supernatural sight. Horses shy away from the target of the curse, and the target suffers a -2 penalty to all Ride rolls for the duration of the Charm. The Charm lasts for one week. Hiparkes may use this Charm while immaterial.

Shapechange—Hiparkes can change form for a cost of six motes. The change lasts for a day, and he can manifest as any specific Marukan horse, deliberately imitating a specific animal, or as a rider, though this form is generic and mimics no one. When imitating an animal, the rider's player can make a (Perception + Ride) check, difficulty 3, to spot the difference, possibly gaining a bonus based on his relationship with the animal (Storyteller's discretion). Any attempt to mimic someone's familiar automatically fails, as such a close relationship cannot be fooled. Hiparkes can also manifest as a mighty-thewed man, a massive stallion or a herd of heavenly horses.

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A Single Day's Ride—By spending 20 motes and one Willpower, Hiparkes, and one passenger upon his back, may ride to anywhere in Creation in a single day (from sun-up to sundown, or visa-versa). The ride takes the whole day, and Hiparkes can bring his rider only to someplace reasonably accessible to horses with two exceptions: He may ride across water and leap gaping canyons. He cannot bring his rider to a small chamber that he does not fit in, however, nor may he ride through walls. Hiparkes cannot use this Charm to take his rider to someplace outside of Creation, but he may bring her to the edge of Creation. For example, he can take his rider to the edge of Cecylene, but not into Malfeas itself. To do that would require normal riding, rather than Charm-enhanced travel.

The Star Bridle—Leather as dark as night, studded with fine, sparkling diamonds, makes up this magnificent bridle. Should Hiparkes mount it upon a horse, whether mortal or divine, and spend 10 motes and one Willpower, the horse is instantly tamed, performing whatever tasks the bearer requires of him. Hiparkes wore the bridle when he was a heavenly steed, and he now keeps it locked away in his study. He never uses it (he has no need), but he can either give it away, or a thief could take it from him. In either case, Hiparkes loses the Charm, and the current bearer gains it. After a week has passed, the bridle returns to Hiparkes. Hiparkes prizes this object and would never willingly give it up unless truly dire circumstances compelled him.

Hiparkes has the First, Second and Third Excellencies for the following Abilities: Melee, Presence, Resistance, Ride, War.

Join Battle: 6

Attacks:

Kick: Speed 5, Accuracy 10, Damage 12B, Defense 4, Rate 1

Trample (herd form only): Speed 6, Accuracy 15, Damage 16L, Defense 1, Rate 1

Lance (The Heaven Spur): Speed 4, Accuracy 12, Damage 14L, Defense 6, Rate 2

Short Bow (The Bow of Hiparkes): Speed 6, Accuracy 10, Damage 10L, Range 250, Rate 3

Soak: 8L/18B (Equine resilience, 5L/12B; Hardness: 4L/4B)

Health Levels: -0/-0/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Dodge DV: 7 **Willpower:** 8 (10 temporary)

Essence: 5 **Essence Pool:** 140

Cost to Materialize: 65

Other Notes: Herds and herds of horses, both divine and mortal, attend Hiparkes. These horses, and his cult within Marukan, do his bidding, quietly manipulating events in the plainlands at his behest. His horses are the finest in the Scavenger Lands (some say Creation), and he will make gifts of them to honorable servants or impressive visitors, but only if they prove themselves a friend of horses. Hiparkes behaves, in many ways, like a matchmaker. He values his horses but feels they live their fullest when they have a rider. If he meets a worthy rider, then, he is quick to try to pair them up with a matching steed.

Shalrina, Daimyo of Faces

Hidden away behind crooked streets and blind alleyways, a small store lies amidst the crumbling brick buildings of downtown Nexus. Most never notice it. A few step into it by mistake, and marvel at the stunning collection of varied and exotic masks, some so lifelike they seem to watch the accidental customers. An unassuming, attractive girl smiles at them, offers a few masks and then sends them on their way. But some patrons seek the store out, taking in the musty scent of discarded lives and pleading with the owner to give them a new identity, a new beginning. Shalrina, the Daimyo of Faces, can do all of that… and more.

Where most see a magical mask-maker or a minor godling, Shalrina is actually a powerful goddess who abandoned her rich mansion in Yu-Shan for life in the streets of Nexus. Precisely why she did this or why she changes her face from decade to decade remains her closely guarded secret, and none of her customers pester her with questions. Her former compatriots in Heaven assume she tired of the endless games of Yu-Shan and abandoned it for an exotic tryst in Creation.

In reality, Shalrina maintains tabs on Yu-Shan and continues to play a crafty game of politics using her customers as pawns. All of her services cost the buyer a single favor, often a small prayer offered to a god of her choice, the theft of a small trinket or some similar minor task. She carefully manipulates all these small favors to draw more power into her hands, and her reach extends far beyond what most people could possibly imagine from the simple, shy-eyed shop owner.

Shalrina can manifest in whatever form she wishes, but she generally appears as an attractive young woman with long brown hair and kind eyes, wearing the latest fashions.

Sanctum: Shalrina lives in her shop. She makes her sanctum available to any mortal she feels should enter it. When present in the real world, it wedges itself between two larger buildings as though it has always been there. When it's hidden, nobody notices that the mask shop that was there yesterday has vanished.

Motivation: To increase her power in Creation.

Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 7, Stamina 5; Charisma 5, Manipulation 5, Appearance 6; Perception 5, Intelligence 5, Wits 5

Virtues: Compassion 3, Conviction 4, Temperance 4, Valor 2

Abilities: Awareness 3, Bureaucracy 6, Craft (Wood) 6 (Mask-Making +3), Dodge 4, Integrity 4, Investigation 3, Linguistics (Native: Old Realm; Others: Forest-Tongue, Guild Cant, High Realm, Rivertongue) 4, Larceny 4, Lore 5, Martial Arts 4, Occult 5, Socialize 2 (Demure +1)

Backgrounds: Allies 5 (whoever currently owes her a favor), Contacts 5, Cult 3, Influence 1, Resources 4

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Spirit Charms:
Essence Plethora (x4)—Shalrina has 40 additional motes of Essence in her Essence pool.
Face-Craft Mastery Spirit—For 15 motes and one Willpower, Shalrina can craft a talismanic mask permanently imbued with minor powers. These masks often appear as exotic exaggerations of their effects. (A mask that elicits fear, for example, may be grotesque, while a mask that makes the wearer stealthy may be a simplistic half-white, half-black, featureless mask.) Crafting the mask takes an hour and a successful (Conviction + Craft) roll. Success creates a mask that grants the wearer two bonus dice to a specific task, usually as specific as a specialty. "Fighting" is too general, but "Swordsmanship" is not. These masks are generally cheaper than her other services, requiring a single favor and an amount of money equivalent to Resources 3 (though this price varies, depending on the favor asked and the customer in question). Shalrina can make more powerful masks, but such masks follow the normal rules for artifact creation, rather than the simple imbedding of power into leather and wood that Face-Craft Mastery Spirit entails.
Face-Trading Grasp—For 10 motes and one Willpower, Shalrina can take the minds and hearts of two willing individuals and trade them. Each has a new body, a new face and a new life thereafter. This Charm is her most sought trick, and those with problems often come to her, pleading for a new life. She demands half of her customer's wealth and a single favor to be given at some later time. Most agree, and she carefully chooses a suitable switch among her clientele. (She might, for example, trade the form of a poor young pauper who wishes for a life of luxury with that of a wealthy old man who wishes for a chance at youth again.) This Charm cannot trade Exaltation, however. An Exalt who "switches faces" retains Exaltation in his new body. This Charm does fool fate, however, and the targets gain each other's fates, including Sidereal fate effects. Therefore, a prince doomed to die can escape his fate by trading faces with someone else.
Hurry Home—Shalrina has a single key at her belt that, when used upon any door, opens to the back door of her shop, allowing her to return immediately home.
Mask-Melting Kiss—For 10 motes and one Willpower, Shalrina's lips can drain away the features of someone's face, leaving them unrecognizably generic. The eyes of observers will slide past them, as though they are little more than a feature of the scenery: just another peasant, for example, another face in the crowd. This Charm permanently drops the target's Appearance to 1 but reduces the difficulty of all Stealth rolls by one and increases the difficulty of any Awareness rolls to recognize him by two. In most cases, not even the target's family will recognize him after this. Shalrina uses this Charm on customers who need to escape some dire consequences immediately. As usual, she demands half their wealth and a single favor to be performed at a later date. This Charm also fools fate to a degree, increasing the difficulty of fate-effects "finding" the target by two. Shalrina can use this effect on herself, in which case, it lasts only for a scene.
Measure the Wind—Shalrina sees beyond all masks and intuitively grasps someone's nature and power when she first meets them.
Mind-Draining Touch—If Shalrina strikes someone in combat, she may spend 10 motes and one Willpower to reflexively activate this Charm and tear away his personality. Roll damage for the attack normally, but each success, rather than inflicting health levels of damage, eliminates one point of temporary Willpower instead. If all of a character's Willpower is drained in this manner, he becomes a husk without mind, without personality, free to be filled with a new mind at her leisure. She often keeps these husks in the back of her shop, offering the more attractive ones to customers as new bodies. She may not target anyone with this Charm who has an Essence equal to or higher than her own. An Eclipse or God-Blood may learn this Charm, but if he does so, he uses his own "punch" traits to make the attack, not the traits listed here.
Principle of Motion—Shalrina has eight extra actions ready in her pool.
Shapechange—Shalrina can appear as anyone who has entered her shop. Her shape and features are always human, and she usually favors a feminine form.
Shalrina has the First, Second and Third Excellencies for the following Abilities: Bureaucracy, Craft, Investigation, Larceny, Occult, Socialize,
Join Battle: 8
Attacks:
Face-Stealing Touch: Speed 5, Accuracy 13, Damage 12B, Defense 6, Rate 3
Soak: 20L/20B (Tough seeming, 17L/15B; Hardness: 10)
Health Levels: -0/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap
Dodge DV: 9 **Willpower:** 8
Essence: 6 **Essence Pool:** 140
Cost to Materialize: 70
Other Notes: None

Five Days Darkness

When the Primordials bid the Unconquered Sun to first flare with all his glory, his light cut away the strange half-twilight that had covered Creation's half-formed face until then. His brilliance flooded all parts of the world, but it also cast a shadow, as all light, all virtue, must. This shadow fled the light of its creator and hid in the dark places of the world. The shadow suckled at the teat of the Ebon Dragon and learned the secrets of the world. Yet, he yearned to return to his proper place in Creation, for he was a god after a fashion. Yet when he approached his creator, the Unconquered Sun, he found he could not bear the brilliance of the lord of Yu-Shan. Nor could he stand before the light of Luna or the Maidens. He turned, instead, to the calendar spirits, seeking to join their number, offering his knowledge of secrets and his Charms over peace and security in an effort to gain them as allies and friends. They rejected him.

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"How can we trust a being who turns away from the bright center of Creation? One that cannot bear the light of the Unconquered Sun?" they asked.

Humiliated and resentful, he fled to Creation and took up the title of Five Days Darkness. The powers of the year would not have him, so he would seek his revenge and rule the five days they could not, enacting complicated plots to humiliate them and bring them under his influence.

Five Days Darkness wears many forms as he walks the face of Creation. He appears most often as a tall, slim man, beautiful in countenance and powerful in body, a perfect replica of the images of the Unconquered Sun except for the inky darkness of his body, as though he was void made flesh. Other times, he appears as an amorphous blob of darkness or as an animal with jet-black, unreflecting eyes. His voice throbs low and powerful, echoing the voice that last spoke to him. In whatever form he wears, Five Days Darkness exists only at night. The moment the first ray of light strikes him, he vanishes, only to reappear when the last vestige of the sun-disk has slipped over the edge of the horizon, with no knowledge of events that have occurred in the interim. This weakness complicates his plots considerably.

Many who learn of Five Days Darkness's existence assume he is a creature of evil or one that stands in opposition of the Unconquered Sun. Nothing could be further from the truth. Five Days Darkness is deeply attached to the being that created him, constantly yearning for, but never able to touch, the glory of the sun. He avoids the Exalted of the Unconquered Sun, but not out of distaste. He enjoys their company, particularly that of the Night Caste and willingly aids them if asked. Only, he feels uncomfortable in their presence, particularly when they shine forth with the power of the sun. Likewise, he despises the Dragon-Blooded and enjoys using their own Immaculate techniques to defeat them, and he disdains the Abyssal Exalted, whom he sees as a corruption of the Solar Exalted.

His wrath, therefore, does not focus upon the Incarnae, for they did not reject him. He saves it for the calendar spirits who humiliated him and disdained him. By whispering into the ears of mortal rulers and petty godlings, his plots draw the calendar spirits into his debt or craft embarrassing scenarios. He offers subtle power and secrets gathered from the dark places of the earth to those who aid him in his machinations. Outside of his intrigues with the fractious calendar courts, those who meet him describe his as honorable and wise, with a hint of tragic loneliness in his dark, dark eyes and an edge of dry sarcasm to his tongue.

Sanctum: Five Days Darkness has no spiritual abode to call home. He wanders the world, an outcast of Yu-Shan and Creation alike.

Motivation: To humiliate and control the gods of the calendar.

Attributes: Strength 9, Dexterity 8, Stamina 14; Charisma 5, Manipulation 5, Appearance 5; Perception 5, Intelligence 7, Wits 5

Virtues: Compassion 2, Conviction 5, Temperance 4, Valor 3

Abilities: Archery 4, Athletics 4, Awareness 5, Dodge 5, Integrity 4, Investigation 3, Linguistics (Native: Old Realm; Others: Flame Tongue, Guild Cant, High Realm, Low Realm, Rivertongue, Seatongue) 6 (Poetry +3), Larceny 3, Lore 5, Martial Arts 6 (Immaculate Techniques +3), Occult 7, Performance 3, Presence 5, Resistance 5, Socialize 5, Stealth 6

Backgrounds: Resources 3

Spirit Charms:

Damping the Inner Light—For 20 motes and one Willpower, Five Days Darkness may offer direct, divine power to another. He leans forward and kisses the willing target, who accepts a sliver of Five Days Darkness into her, gaining his dark nature in exchange for power. Damping the Inner Light grants a permanent increase of Essence by 1 to the target. This costs the target no experience points, and mortals gifted with this Charm become, effectively, God-Blooded. The target forever forsakes a single dot of Virtue, however. A single Virtue of the target's choice loses one dot, and the maximum possible value drops by one. Further, the target becomes "a creature of darkness" for the purpose of Charms and powers that affects such beings. Often, changes to the target accompany this Charm, such as a darkening of the eyes or hair. An Eclipse may learn this Charm, but to do so requires him to give up a single dot of a Virtue and lowers the maximum possible value of that Virtue by one, just as if he were under the effects of the Charm (but hadn't gained an extra dot of Essence). He may not use the Charm on himself and must have (at the Storyteller's discretion) previously learned another of Five Days Darkness's Charms or a Charm that imbues another with power for an extended period of time. Further, the Eclipse must have an Essence of at least 5. Mortals whom the Eclipse endows with this Charm become God-Blooded related to Five Days Darkness, not the Eclipse.

Essence Plethora (x6)—Five Days Darkness has 60 additional motes of Essence in his Essence pool.

Immaculate Martial Arts Techniques—Five Days Darkness has mastered all five Elemental Dragon Styles. A rough guide to their effects can be found in the **Exalted Storytellers Companion**, pages **22-31**, or their full effects may be found in **The Manual of Exalted Power: The Dragon-Blooded.**

Measure the Wind—Five Days Darkness uses this Charm to intuitively sense the power and nature of someone in his presence.

Principle of Motion—Five Days Darkness has nine extra actions ready in his pool.

Reserve of Will (x3)—Five Days Darkness stores three additional temporary Willpower.

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Shadow-Plumbing Gaze—For five motes, Five Days Darkness may slip behind the shadows of the world, watching the skeins of discarded fate-threads that form behind the curtains of Creation for insight into a long-hidden secret. Each activation of this Charm allows the Storyteller to make a single (Temperance + Investigation) roll in an extended test for Five Days Darkness to uncover a single secret that he wishes to know. The difficulty of the roll depends on how well-hidden the secret is: 5 might be enough for the dirty laundry of a small city's mayor, but the location of the Empress would require more than 25. If the secret has "seen the light of day" (e.g., enough people know it, the secret has been discussed in broad daylight, or some physical aspect of the secret, such as a murder weapon or a body, has touched sunlight), then Five Days Darkness simply cannot find the information he seeks. This Charm is best deployed when hunting for secrets hidden away indoors or beneath the ground. Five Days Darkness may use this Charm only while he is immaterial.

Shapechange—Five Days Darkness can appear as any animal or any mortal, though he cannot deliberately copy individuals. His inky black eyes give away his presence, and when disguising himself, he must put effort into hiding his eyes from others.

Unearthed Riches—For five motes per Resources dot, Five Days Darkness may summon up the jewels and rich metals of the earth. The riches he calls up have to have never touched the light of day, so he cannot steal them from a Guild's caravan, for example. Every five motes spent generates a single Resources dot's worth of gems and precious metals, enough to make a single purchase. (Enough gems and gold to purchase a rich palace would cost Five Days Darkness 25 motes, for example.) The touch of his shadow taints the riches, however, and anyone who accepts them suffers a -1 reduction in her Temperance trait for the space of three nights. Her Temperance remains normal during the day, though.

Void-Slumber Meditation—For 20 motes, Five Days Darkness offers another the peace and bliss that only complete absence of consciousness can bring. The willing target vanishes from this world, entering Elsewhere in a quiet slumber for a full night and a full day. Once the sun slips below the horizon on the following night, the character reappears in the exact spot she left, with all of her wounds completely healed. All damage vanishes after this single day. Further, the slumber is exceptionally peaceful, and the character gains two additional dice on her Conviction roll to regain Willpower. This Charm cannot heal aggravated damage.

Five Days Darkness has the First, Second and Third Excellencies for the following Abilities: Dodge, Investigation, Larceny, Martial Arts, Presence, Resistance, Socialize, Stealth.

Join Battle: 10

Attacks:

Punch: Speed 5, Accuracy 18, Damage 9B, Defense 19, Rate 3

Kick: Speed 5, Accuracy 17, Damage 12B, Defense 15, Rate 2

Bite (animal forms only): Speed 6, Accuracy 15, Damage 12L, Defense 5, Rate 1

Soak: 15L/30B (Umbral form, 8L/16B; Hardness: 10L/10B)

Health Levels: -0/-0/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Dodge DV: 10 **Willpower:** 9 (12 temporary)

Essence: 7 **Essence Pool:** 175

Cost to Materialize: 80

Other Notes: For the purposes of the Zenith Anima effect and any Charm that targets such creatures, Five Days Darkness is considered a creature of darkness. This doesn't reflect his morality, rather it reflects his nature. If bathed in the light of a fully totemic Solar Anima (in other words, the character spent more than 15 peripheral motes), Five Days Darkness suffers a penalty to all actions equal to the Solar's Essence. If the Solar exerting the anima has an Essence higher than Five Days Darkness, the god vanishes just as though he was struck by daylight and does not return until the Solar's anima light no longer touches the area.

Monsters of the Scavenger Lands

Arad the Hunter

At the peak of every food chain, mortal and immortal, there strides an apex predator, a hunter without peer. In the dawn-time of Creation, long before the Ages of Man, one such creature roamed the young world, a monster that cowed gods and slew immortals: Arad the Hunter. Created by the Primordials as the first and greatest of hunters, this behemoth pursued anything that intrigued him. Entire species vanished from the face of early Creation simply because they gave him sport. The ground trembled with fear as he hunted the Dragon of Earth. Flame roared in defiance as he wrestled down the Dragon of Fire, and forests shuddered and fell silent when he raised his spear over the Dragon of Wood. Each surrendered power to him, imbuing his spear, Usilk, with enchantments and agreeing to forever withhold their claws from his flesh. A wood goddess named Pula loved him once, and he returned her passion with passion of his own, reverently slaying her and forging a bow from her bones and heart. Emboldened by his conquests, the master predator turned his eyes to the heavens. His spear slew many stars, sending their dying flesh plummeting to the earth below, until the Maidens uncovered his designs. He hunted the moon, but she hid her face from him and danced across the sky, hunting him in return. He struck at the Sun to test him, and the return stroke burned and darkened Arad's hide. So, the great hunter lowered his head and returned to the terrestrial sphere, content to remain its lord even if he yearned to hunt the skies.

His ascendancy did not last forever. When the heavens imbued mortals, a prey he had ignored as too clumsy and too slow for good sport, with Exaltation, suddenly Arad the

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Hunter found himself on the run. Glorious warriors burned with the heat that had once scorched his hide and sent hounds after him that shifted as the moon did. The champions of the stars revealed his hiding places, and the armies of the earth, the woods and fire denied him his easy escape routes. Licking his wounds, he fled beyond the edge of the world and hunted the madness of the Wyld.

But Arad the Hunter is immortal. When the walls of Creation fell during the Great Contagion, he crept back into the world, evading the barbarian tribes and their shape-shifting gods. He hunted quietly and slowly, for that was all he knew, and he came to understand the new shape of the world. He contented himself by pursuing small game, such as minor Lunars, Forest Kings and escaped demons. When he caught word of the return of his greatest enemies, the Solars, and their strange, new dark kin, the Abyssals, his heart beat with a passion he had not felt since he felt Pula's blood in his hands while he forged her heart into a bow. Now his feet carry him toward the center of Creation, eager to find his favored prey.

Towering over a dozen feet tall and half so wide at the chest, Arad the Hunter melds the finest traits of earthly predators into a humanlike form. An ugly, flat face stares out from behind a matted mess of dark hair with glinting, cunning eyes. Long, heavy arms dangle past his bandy knees, and scars crisscross the sun-scorched, black hide that stretches over thick, sinewy muscle. Arad the Hunter carries a gray-dappled, bone-and-sinew bow named Pula's Heart and an iron and jade spear named Usilk. He wears no clothing, and when he speaks, his low voice growls with the combined hunger of every predator in Creation.

Although Arad the Hunter belongs to an era long gone, his cunning remains sharp and dangerous. Far from the rampaging monster some ancient lore depicts him as, the greatest of hunters is infinitely patient. Once he chooses his prey, he watches and he waits. He learns all he can about it as he slowly stalks it. He cuts off its escape routes, isolates it from its companions, weakens it with traps and trickery and only engages in battles he is certain he can win. Arad doesn't hesitate to flee and isn't so proud that he can't stop to rest and reevaluate his strategy. Those he hunts know the terror brought on by a truly immortal, inhuman predator.

Motivation: Hunt.

Attributes: Strength 12, Dexterity 10, Stamina 13; Charisma 5, Manipulation 2, Appearance 1; Perception 8, Intelligence 5, Wits 6

Virtues: Compassion 1, Conviction 3, Temperance 3, Valor 5

Abilities: Archery 7 (Pula's Heart +3), Athletics 5, Awareness 7, Craft (Wood) 1 (Traps and Snares +3), Dodge 4, Integrity 2, Linguistics (Native: Old Realm; Others: 20 varieties of Southern and Eastern tribal dialects, some extinct) 4, Lore 2, Medicine 2, Martial Arts 5, Melee 7 (Usilk +3), Presence 5, Resistance 5, Stealth 7, Survival 6 (Tracking +3), Thrown 4

Backgrounds: Artifact 5

Essence Powers:

Animal Life Eating Technique—Arad does not hunt to eat and survive as other animals do. He hunts because it is his nature to do so. Still, he gains sustenance from his kills after a manner. After consuming the heart of his prey, he gains a number of his prey's Charms (of his choosing) equal to his prey's Essence. Each Charm can be used only once, and he must pay for the costs from his own Essence pool, but he need not meet any of the Charms' requirements. Arad can store multiple "copies" of a given Charm. At any given time, Arad usually has a solid stock of divine Charms (at least 50 copies of various Charms), as well as a variety of more exotic Charms, such as Lunar Charms or ghostly Arcanoi. In general, Arad usually has access to Principle of Motion, Measure the Wind and various Excellencies of Archery, Athletics, Awareness, Dodge, Melee, Stealth and Survival. The precise Charms Arad the Hunter has access to at any given point varies and remains up to Storyteller discretion.

Predator's Mien—Arad is the greatest of predators, and any who encounter him know, in their bones, that they are prey before him. The player of anyone who faces Arad the Hunter, whether raksha or Exalt, god or mortal, must first make a Valor check at a difficulty of 2. Those whose players fail must flee. While fearful, the retreat is not necessarily a panic-filled flight (though most mortal animals will flee thus). Rather, the character intuitively takes the role of prey, running from Arad in any manner possible, with her wits about her and heart pounding. The sole exception to this effect are the undead, automata or any other creature that simply cannot know fear.

Rhythm of the Hunt—Arad's heart pounds with the thrum of battle, and he exults in it. By spending 10 motes, Arad attunes himself to the conflict around him, intuitively evading attacks. For the remainder of the scene, his Dodge D V increases by half of his Essence (rounded up).

Unerring Sense of the Hunter—By spending 10 motes, Arad automatically (i.e., without requiring a roll) succeeds at tracking his prey, provided the trail is less than a month old and his prey uses no Charms or Essence powers to hide her tracks. Beyond those limitations, Arad can track a trail no matter how well disguised, muddied, washed away or faded. Against prey using Essence to hide her tracks, Unerring Sense of the Hunter and the protective Charm cancel one another out, and both characters resolve their tracking rolls normally.

Join Battle: 13

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Attacks:
Punch: Speed 5, Accuracy 16, Damage 12B, Defense 17, Rate 3
Kick: Speed 5, Accuracy 15, Damage 15B, Defense 13, Rate 2
Clinch: Speed 6, Accuracy 15, Damage 12B, Defense –, Rate 1
Spear (Usilk): Speed 5, Accuracy 22, Damage 20L*, Defense 7, Rate 2
Bow (Pula's Heart): Speed 5, Accuracy 20, Damage 18L, Range **, Rate 2
* Because of the Charms placed upon Usilk by the Elemental Dragons, Usilk may strike and harm immaterial spirits.
** Because of enchantments laid upon Pula's Heart, it effectively has limitless range. The only limit is how far Arad can see.
Soak: 25L/30B* (Tough hide, 18L/17B)
* As long as Arad bears Usilk, he gains +10L/+10B and a hardness of 10 against weapons and attacks of wood, metal/earth and fire. Elemental air and water attacks bypass this protection.
Health Levels: -0/-0/-0/-0/-0/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/-4/-4/-4/-4/ Incap
Dodge DV: 10 **Willpower:** 9
Essence: 6 **Essence Pool:** 96
Other Notes: Because Pula's Heart is crafted of the body of a goddess, it resists the touch of mere mortals or magical beings unworthy of it. Any character with an Essence less than 6 finds the bow too heavy to wield and the string too taut to pull.
Usilk, Arad's spear, is crafted of simple iron adorned in jade. He may reflexively summon Usilk to his grasp as long as it remains within a mile of him, and he can sense its presence if it remains within 100 miles of him.
Arad heals one bashing health level every five ticks and one lethal health level every minute. He regenerates one mote of Essence every 10 minutes (six per hour), but only while he refrains from battle.

Juggernaut

The Maker of Rubble. The Slayer of Nations. By these names was the living Juggernaut known. A titan of incomprehensible size, he terrorized the peoples of the early days of Creation, his feet crushing the cities of the Dragon Kings and their mortal servants alike. His arms wrestled with the Elemental Dragons, and he laughed with joy. He was invincible, for the Primordials had written into fate the day of his death, and nothing could slay him before his appointed time. Yet in the waning days of the First Age, when the Dragon-Blooded prepared to strike down their masters, a Circle of mighty Lawgivers managed to wound him grievously, laying him low. He rested in that spot, moaning as his life blood formed dark rivers in the Far Eastern lands, until the Mask of Winters, by great fortune, stumbled across him.

Juggernaut is not dead. Many who see the moaning, dragging carcass assume that it is simply the body of a dead behemoth animated by the Mask of Winters' magic. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Mask of Winters' necromancy controls it, directs it and forces it to lay upon the ground, for given its own will and strength, the Slayer of Nations would rise again to stomp across Creation and feel the warm fires of destruction against its flesh once more. But Juggernaut is slowly *dying*. The taint of necrotic Essence, the necromantic slavery and the maggots that infest its flesh slowly sap its strength. It rots as it lives, its flesh tattered, its bones bare. In its misery, it hates its master and yearns either for the glorious freedom it once had or for final release.

Actually treading upon Juggernaut is an experience few forget. The stench overwhelms any mortal nearby, a rancid miasma almost visible at times as a yellowish mist. The meat squishes beneath the visitor's feet, and groves of mushrooms grow upon the banks of dark rivers of blood and sweat. Within Juggernaut, cavernous tunnels of meat and bone rustle with the constant chewing of maggots, and the occasional groan rattles through Juggernaut's body like a tremor. The dead clean pathways in the ichor, leading to the steps of the Mask of Winters' citadel, a cold and sterile palace of soulsteel and basalt, almost a welcome relief after the gruesome horror of the flesh-mountain upon which it rests.
Motivation: Juggernaut is torn between two motivations: to find release, and to walk free and healthy once more, rampaging across Creation. Someone who offers him either quickly gains his loyalty.

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Attributes: Strength 45, Dexterity 1, Stamina 20; Charisma 1, Manipulation 1, Appearance 0; Perception 1, Intelligence 2, Wits 2
Virtues: Compassion 2, Conviction 3, Temperance 1, Valor 3
Abilities: Athletics 1 (Crawling +2), Awareness 1, Lore 2 (Ancient Memories +1), Martial Arts 3 (Striking Massive Units/Creatures +3), Resistance 5
Backgrounds: None
Essence Powers:
Long ago, as the Rubble Maker, Juggernaut had a great number of powers, including invincibility, massively damaging attacks and the ability to start natural disasters. These abilities are irrecoverably lost to him now, for he is just the steed upon which a Deathlord's citadel rides. The dead within him have Arcanoi, however, and nemissaries often employ them on his behalf in battle.
Join Battle: 3
Attacks:
Falling Arm Crash: Speed 10, Accuracy 4, Damage 45B, Defense 2, Rate 1*
* Falling Arm Crash is so large that it may not be parried by anything smaller than a behemoth (at the Storyteller's discretion, someone in a Royal warstrider *might* be able to parry it with a stunt), or with a suitable Charm. In mass combat, Juggernaut gains a +3 bonus to attack suitably large units (gained from his listed specialty) and inflicts double damage (two health levels per success on the damage roll) against units in close formation.
Soak: 30L/40B (Insensate corpse-flesh, 20L/20B; Hardness: 15L/20B)
Health Levels: -0x5/-1x30/-2x30/-4 x 5/Incap
Dodge DV: 0 **Willpower:** 4
Essence: 6 **Essence Pool:** 90
Other Notes: Juggernaut's flesh remains rich with Essence, though he can no longer access his Essence pool. Instead, the Mask of Winters' giant maggot hordes constantly feed upon that Essence, gorging themselves and growing larger.
Juggernaut may engage in mass combat as a solo unit with an effective Magnitude of 9. This trait reflects his enormous size and, as such, does not increase his effective health levels. Even if incapacitated, Juggernaut only falls into a deep, fitful slumber for a lunar month, and he will not die before his appointed day. He heals quickly, despite constantly rotting and regenerates all bashing damage and 10 lethal health levels every night when the sun falls below the horizon.

Mother Bog

Deep in the east of the Scavenger Lands, a living slowly crawls across the land. Asleep, it appears no different from any other marsh: wet and unpleasant, but not sinister. Awake, however, its entire demeanor changes. Warm, moist wind, rich with the scent of decay, flows back and forth across tepid ponds as she breathes. Knotholes in rotting logs gape curiously at travelers, hanging leaves and vines rustling and whispering softly to them. If angered, the swamp rises up and drags down a new victim or slowly pulls itself toward the home of the interloper, swallowing more and more ground into itself. The villages that border her offer her living tribute, usually animal, sometimes human, to keep her satisfied until she loses interest and leaves. They call her Mother Bog.

Mother Bog predates humanity, an ancient being born sometime in the primordial dawn of Creation. She doesn't remember the moment she first became aware of the world around her, but she does remember hunting living prey and learning how to catch it so she would never go hungry. She remembers mortals tricking her out of a prized bauble, and she learned magic so mortals would bring her gifts, rather than stealing them away. She remembers the searing pain of the blade of a Solar, and she learned to birth champions so that no one could directly strike her again.

Today, she roams the land, stopping near rural villages to demand tribute through the voice of her "daughters," constructs she builds herself from the corpses of offerings. She swallows the land of those who fail to appease her. While a living swamp is difficult to damage, Mother Bog is far from invulnerable to humans, and she keeps a careful distance from Lookshy, remembering difficult and troublesome battles in the past. When she isn't eating, she slowly explores, finding lost secrets and burying them into her soil-flesh, and by now, she has a magnificent collection beneath her surface. With the return of the Solars, her wanderings grow quicker and more purposeful. She still remembers the Solar that wounded her, still hates the pain he caused. She knows he is reborn, and she will have his soul as a plaything or, barring that, destroy it.
Motivation: To grow. Mother Bog is somewhat alien (what does a living swamp want?), but expansion, whether of form, knowledge or power, drives her more than any other desire.
Attributes: Strength 12, Dexterity 6, Stamina 8; Charisma 6, Manipulation 6, Appearance 4; Perception 6, Intelligence 7, Wits 6

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Virtues: Compassion 2, Conviction 4, Temperance 4, Valor 3
Abilities: Athletics 3, Awareness 6, Craft (Wood) 6, Dodge 6, Integrity 6, Investigation 6, Linguistics (Native: A primal, forgotten tongue that predates human language; Others: Old Realm, Rivertongue, 6 various tribal dialects and extinct languages) 3, Lore 7, Medicine 6, Martial Arts 6 (Clinch +3), Occult 8, Presence 3, Resistance 6, Stealth 6, Survival 6
Backgrounds: Artifact 5, Cult 3, Followers 5, Manse 5, Resources 5
Essence Powers:
Craft Children—Rather than fight directly, Mother Bog gathers the corpses of offerings given to her and crafts champions from them. Shamblers, warriors and defenders resembling a mass of vegetation, require a large sacrifice, often a man and an expenditure of 50 motes. Daughters, Mother Bog's beautiful, feminine diplomats, require a well-preserved female corpse and 100 motes. Creepers, small, sorcerous creatures crafted entirely of sludge, require the corpse of a small child or a beloved pet and 150 motes. She often has many of these children on hand to send out at any given time. When dealing with interlopers, she usually sends at least one Shambler per invader, one Daughter per two Shamblers and one Creeper per group. she doesn't have an infinite supply of children, however (as she has a finite number of corpses at her disposal), so she must husband her resources, sometimes preferring retreat to a fight.
Terrestrial Circle Sorcery—As a powerful sorceress, Mother Bog knows all published Terrestrial Circle spells and a few lost spells that nobody in Creation currently knows about. While she could teach these spells to others, she is loath to give up any secrets to anyone who might harm her or is unworthy of her attention. While she has no obvious body, she can work her magic through her swamp: vines twitch themselves into ritually significant shapes, rings of mushrooms blossom and the warm, wet wind of the swamp breathes ritual incantations, clearly indicating the casting of the spell.
Essence Infusion—Mother Bog *is* the swamp. Her nature infuses the soil, the water and the air. She can make that Essence available to her children simply by offering it to them. The air crackles with power, and as the pool is spent, her presence becomes clearer and clearer. She can invest any amount, but she typically invests ([X+1] x 40) motes, where X equals the number of daughters and creepers engaged in the battle. All of her children gain equal access to the pool, and as they typically have only a very small amount of Essence available to them, this pool reflects the majority of their resources.
Manifest Avatar—For the cost of 100 motes, Mother Bog can create a vast, humanoid version of herself. In this form, she can battle directly with her foes and affect the world in a very real, physical manner. When she does so, she uses the listed traits directly, rather than indirectly as usual. Manifesting represents a real danger to her, however, for she may be damaged in a normal manner. Therefore, she seldom assumes this shape anymore—and cannot as long as her heart is split between four manses as it is now. Yet while using her Essence, she displays a shadow of her uniquely beautiful avatar looming above the battlefield, not unlike the anima display of the Exalted. When visible, moss and vines drape her clearly feminine form, and eyes like still pools of water stare out at her foes.
Join Battle: 12
Attacks:
Suspicious Accident: Speed 10, Accuracy 13, Damage 12B, Defense 6, Rate 1*
Dragging Earth: Speed 9, Accuracy 18, Damage **, Defense 3, Rate 1
* "Suspicious Accident" represents subtle attacks using the body of the swamp. A rotten log falls upon a target or a vine trips someone up. Damage and accuracy are given as guidelines, and Storytellers are invited to alter the traits to reflect differing attacks.
** Dragging Earth reflects the sucking mud of the swamp. This attack clinches its foe and deals no damage. A successful clinch inflicts a -1 external penalty to all actions. A second successful clinch inflicts an additional -1 external penalty (for -2 successes total). A third successful clinch buries the target, who suffers from suffocation. Should the victim succeed at the clinch roll, she manages to negate the penalties as she drags herself free. Allies may attempt to beat Mother Bog's clinch total to drag their friends to safety.
Soak: 20L/* (Marsh body, 16L/*)
* Mother Bog is immune to all bashing damage
Health Levels: -0x10/-1x40/-2x40/-4 x 10/Incap
Dodge DV: 10 **Willpower:** 8
Essence: 8 **Essence Pool:** 1,000
Other Notes: Mother Bog doesn't interact directly with the world. Rather, she uses her swamp-body to manipulate the world on a grosser, larger scale. She grapples with hills, not with individual mortals. As a result, these traits are listed as rough guidelines should a roll be necessary, and the physical traits represent a more specific point within the swamp. A mortal struggling against a tree limb deals with her listed Strength of 12. Against an entire fortress wall, however, Mother Bog has considerably more strength. In her avatar form, use the traits listed above *directly*.
As a piece of mobile land, Mother Bog cannot be meaningfully hurt by mortal hands. A single man with a spear is no danger to her. A thousand men with shovels, on the other hand, are more problematic. Mother Bog ignores the damage of individuals, and she cannot be engaged in standard combat. She may be engaged in mass combat, however, where she is considered to have an effective Magnitude of 9. (This trait does not increase her health levels, though. Her listed health levels take the Magnitude of her being into account.) Those who wish to harm her must have a Might of at least 1 or engineering tools appropriate to the task at hand. Individuals of suitable potency may engage her on a mass-combat scale: a suitably powerful sorcerer, for example. Harming her in this way isn't lasting, and she heals any damage taken in

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this manner at a rate of one health level per day, presuming she has fresh land to consume. She may be incapacitated through mass-combat damage, but not slain, and she will recover even from incapacitation after a few weeks.

To truly deal her lasting harm, her heart must be found and destroyed. Knowing this, she split her heart into four parts, took them to the four corners of the world and hid them in four different manses. Removing them will destroy the manses in which they reside, and once assembled, they can be damaged directly (following the listed traits for soak and health levels). Once the hundredth health level is inflicted to the heart, it explodes, inflicting 100 bashing damage on everyone within 100 yards, and Mother Bog dies, leaving a 100 mile wide desert in her place. She slowly reforms after a millennium, and then, it takes another millennium to regain her full strength.

Because her heart is attuned to four separate, powerful manses, she regenerates 80 motes an hour. Her Manse Background reflects this fact.

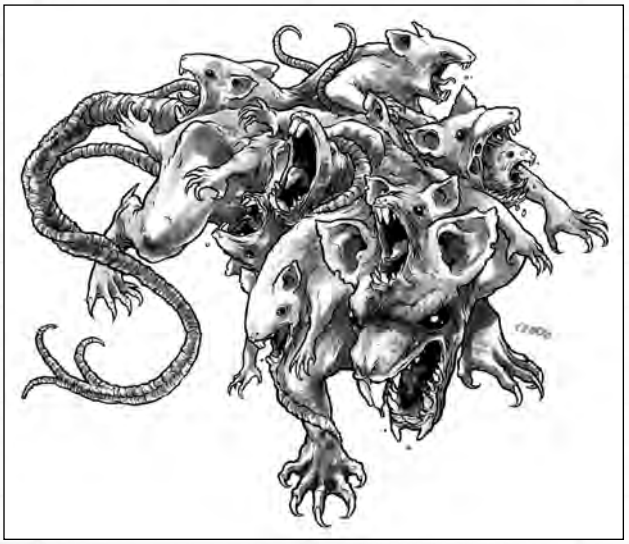
The traits for her creepers, daughters and shamblers are listed on pages **158-160**. Her Followers Background reflects these beings.

Mother Bog has vast stores of artifacts and treasures hidden away in her body that she can regurgitate to offer as bargaining chips. Her Resources and her Artifact Backgrounds reflect these items.

Beasts of the Scavenger Lands

Emperor Rat

As worrisome as giant rats are, they fail to elicit the whispered, wide-eyed fear that their larger, more horrific cousin the emperor rats do. Sometimes called rat-hydras, these monsters writhe with a dozen heads, as though several large rats had been pressed together into the body of one massive rat. Furious claws and wild eyes press out in all directions, biting and clawing at anything they can reach. The hulking central rat can grow to the size of a bull, and the image of a lion-sized horde of claws and rat faces bearing down its prey is enough to unnerve anyone. Not as intelligent as their cousins, emperor rats tend to use their bulk to rule their brethren, demanding sustenance be brought to it and eating anything it can catch. Still, despite the occasional loss of a townsman to their gullets, the people of Creation have managed to profit from their presence. Mercenaries make good money hunting them down, some wealthy debutantes keep them as exotic pets, and audiences thrill to their ferocity in pit fights and gladiatorial matches.



Giant Maggot

An innumerable horde of these unpleasant creatures riddles the flesh of the Mask of Winters' Juggernaut, feasting upon his body as they swell in size. Each is pale white and translucent (and as tall as a horse at the shoulder and twice as long), with a skein of purple and red arteries visible just beneath its skin. The foremost portion of their segmented bodies is eyeless, surmounted with a jawless mouth ringed with sharp, meat-rending teeth. The Mask of Winters cultivates these pets, allowing them to grow large and strong upon a meal of Juggernaut's Essence, waiting patiently for the day that his corpse-mountain bursts, overflowing with maggots that he can direct toward his foes. Currently, however, they content themselves to remain in their warm, decaying home, and generally, the people of Creation only encounter them when visiting Juggernaut or exploring the outskirts of Thorns.

Giant Rat

Rats are among the most durable species in Creation. They can survive everything from exposure to the Wyld to sorcerous contamination… but not unchanged. Living in the warrens beneath many overpopulated cities or digging out burrows beneath rural villages, rats sometimes grow larger than hounds, and many become intelligent. Some farmers or

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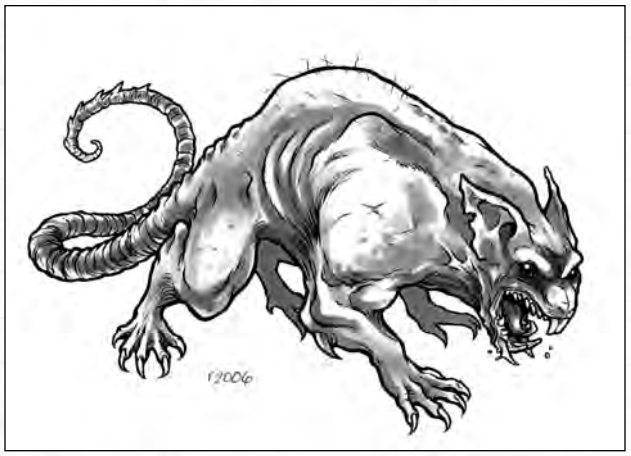

disenfranchised citizens report waking to find rats watching them in their sleep, rubbing their paws and chittering quietly to one another. Strange letters appear clawed into the walls of half-forgotten cellars. As though peasants hadn't enough to fear from them, these oversized vermin often transmit plague with their bites. Those that stray too far into the Wyld return with even more mutations, and hobgoblins sometimes drive acid-spitting rat-monsters before them or ride armor-shelled rats into battle.

Karmeus

These Wyld-twisted birds make their home in Nexus, in the Firewander District, occasionally foraying out into the rest of the city. Their wings span nearly three yards, adorned with glittering black feathers. Their eyes burn with green fire, and between their stone-cracking beaks, an all-too-human face spits obscenities in a grating voice. When a karmeus hunts, it

latches onto its target, dragging it high into the air and then dropping it far below. They prefer small, soft prey—usually lone children. Because they enjoy the taste of rotted meat, they often leave the body of their prey to hang for a time, and small corpses dangle from high rooftops in Firewander and nearby districts. While certainly not intelligent (and one cannot reason with them), they are cunning enough to evade traps and to engage in hit-and-run tactics. The Council hunts them as best they can, but karmeus roost in the highest buildings and fight viciously if cornered in their nest, making extermination a difficult process.

The Lookshy Rebel

Centuries ago, seditionists within Lookshy gathered to complain against the military order imposed upon them by their city. They retired to their host's cellar, conspiring late into the night before impulsively deciding that their operation needed a larger lair and to expand the cellar. Digging into the walls revealed a strangely light and hollow orb of rusted iron. They argued among themselves over who owned it, until one impatiently cracked it with a shovel to see what lay within. Moments latter, a hulking form stumbled out of the house, a hulking amalgam of all of the conspirators wrapped into a single, misshapen form. The Dragon-Blooded watched in horror that slowly turned into amusement as the creature fumbled about ineptly, shouting out anti-Lookshy slogans, and then, they cut it down, dumping the body into the bay. That should have been the end of the problem, but it wasn't. It returned again and again, still clumsy, still hateful, and every time, they tore it apart and burned the pieces, only to watch it return some years later. Sometimes, it appears as it did before. Other times, it seems to be a melding of new people. Each time, it takes more innocent lives. While it centers its activity on Lookshy, some travelers report seeing it in other locales throughout the Scavenger Lands, particularly in places allied to Lookshy. Scholars who research the tale speculate that the iron orb contained some manner of Wyld energy and that, to truly kill the Lookshy Rebel, the orb must be found and resealed.

The Children of Mother Bog

Creeper

The strangest and least seen of Mother Bog's creations, these sorcerous blobs of mud contain the bulk of her power. She crafts them from the corpses of children and beloved pets, and they resemble small, vaguely shaped children

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made of mud. They avoid attention wherever possible, and a warband usually contains at least one, often hiding in the shoulders of a shambler. When daughters need aid dealing with a recalcitrant village, a creeper might journey with them, providing magical support. Rarely, a creeper is seen alone, using stealth and sorcery to assassinate one of Mother Bog's foes. Creepers have an Essence of 3 and 30 motes available to them (though as always, they have access to the pool of Essence Mother Bog grants the group). Their only Charm is Invoke the Circle of the Earth. By spending 15 motes, they may cast Terrestrial Circle spells for the remainder of the scene (at normal cost and activation times). They typically know three spells, though which spells are up to Mother Bog.

Daughter

Mother Bog's daughters interact with the rest of the world as her diplomats. Always crafted from female sacrifices, the daughters' corpses are finely preserved in peat, gaining astonishing flexibility and grace. Normally pallid or the color of peat, they can use their magic to become more appealing and indistinguishable from a living mortal. A daughter has an Essence of 2 and 20 motes available to her, though she may access the pool of Essence Mother Bog invests in her children. Most of a daughter's powers take the form of dances. Performing the Dance of Death costs 15 motes and requires a Dexterity + Performance roll. Each success reduces her wound penalties for the scene by one, and increases her Martial Arts score by one for the scene. Further, all Martial Arts damage is considered lethal. The Dance of Influence costs 10 motes and requires a (Dexterity + Performance) roll. Each successes grants a bonus die to all Social rolls for the remainder of the scene, to a maximum bonus of her Appearance (normally 1). The Dance of Motion makes her fluid and swift, reducing by one the number of ticks she has to wait until her next action for every three motes spent, to a minimum of one tick. Finally, the Daughter may assume the Illusion of Life by spending 10 motes. Doing so makes it impossible to tell by mundane means that she is a reanimated corpse, and magical means suffer a -1 external penalty. Further, her Appearance increases to 5.

Shambler

Mother Bog's warriors are her most commonly witnessed children, whether they meander across her lands or assault her foes in battle. Constructed from the largest corpses in her stock, these hulking brutes seem made as much of vegetative matter as flesh. Vines cover their bodies, leaves decorate their head masses, and the scent of fungi permeates the air around them. Shamblers have an Essence of 1 and 10 motes, though they may draw upon whatever Essence Mother Bog makes available to the group. They have access to four Charms. For five motes, one may double the damage gained from successes for the remainder of the scene (Bark Fist), extend its neck and limbs by up to six yards for the remainder of the scene (Creeper Vine Reach) or become rooted to the spot it stands on, becoming completely immovable so long as it remains motionless (Deep Root Immovability). For 15 motes, it may activate Walk Through Plants and, for the next hour, merge with living plants, flowing up vines to get into buildings, racing through thick bramble patches or crossing a grassy field unseen.

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Name	Str/Dex/Sta	Per/Int/Wits/Will	Health Levels	Attack (Spd/Acc/Dmg/Rate)	Dodge DV/Soak
Emperor Rat	5/3/5	4/1/3/2	-0x6/-4x4/I	Dominant Bite: 5/6/6L/1, Small Bite: 3/5/3L/3, Claw: 5/6/4L/5	2/2L/5B
Abilities: Athletics 2, Awareness 4, Dodge 1, Integrity 2, Martial Arts 3, Presence 4, Resistance 5, Survival 3					
Giant Maggot	4/4/5	2/1/1/1	-0x3/-1x2/ -2x2/-4/I	Bite: 5/7/7L/1	3/7L/8B
Abilities: Athletics 2, Awareness 1, Dodge 2, Integrity 3, Martial Arts 3, Presence 2, Resistance 3, Stealth 2, Survival 2					
Giant Rat	4/3/4	3/2/3/2	-0/-1x2/ -2x2/-4/I	Bite: 4/5/5L/1, Claw: 5/5/3L/3	2/2L/4B
Abilities: Athletics 2, Awareness 2, Dodge 2, Integrity 1, Investigation 1, Martial Arts 2, Presence 2, Resistance 4, Stealth 3, Survival 2					
Karmeus	3/5/2	4/1/2/2	-0/-1/-2x2/ -4/I	Beak: 4/9/5L/1, Wing Buffet: 5/8/8B/2, Claw: 5/8/6L/4	5/2L/4B
Abilities: Athletics 4, Awareness 1, Dodge 5, Integrity 1, Investigation 1, Martial Arts 4, Presence 2, Resistance 2, Stealth 2, Survival 2					
The Lookshy Rebel	5/1/5	2/3/2/2	-0x10/-1/-2/ -4/I	Punch: 5/5/5B/3, Kick: 5/4/8B/1	1/5L/10B
Abilities: Athletics 1, Awareness 1, Dodge 1, Integrity 4, Investigation 1, Martial Arts 3, Presence 2, Resistance 2, Stealth 2, Survival 2					
Creeper	1/4/3	3/3/3/4	-0x3/-1x2/-2/I	Bite: 6/4/1L/1	3/1L/3B
Abilities: Athletics 3, Awareness 2, Dodge 1, Integrity 3, Investigation 3, Martial Arts 1, Occult 5, Resistance 3, Stealth 5, Survival 3					
Daughter	2/3/2	3/2/3/3	-0x3/-1x2/ -2/-4/I	Slap: 5/4/2B/3	4/1L/2B
Abilities: Athletics 2, Awareness 2, Dodge 4, Integrity 4, Investigation 2, Martial Arts 1, Performance 5, Presence 4, Resistance 3, Socialize 3, Survival 3					
Shambler	6/2/6	4/1/3/2	-0x3/-1x2/ -2/-4/I	Punch: 5/8/6B/3	1/3L/6B
Abilities: Athletics 3 Awareness 1, Investigation 1, Integrity 2, Martial Arts 5, Resistance 4, Stealth 2, Survival 5					

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